

LONDON MEMORIES

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LONDON MEMORIES

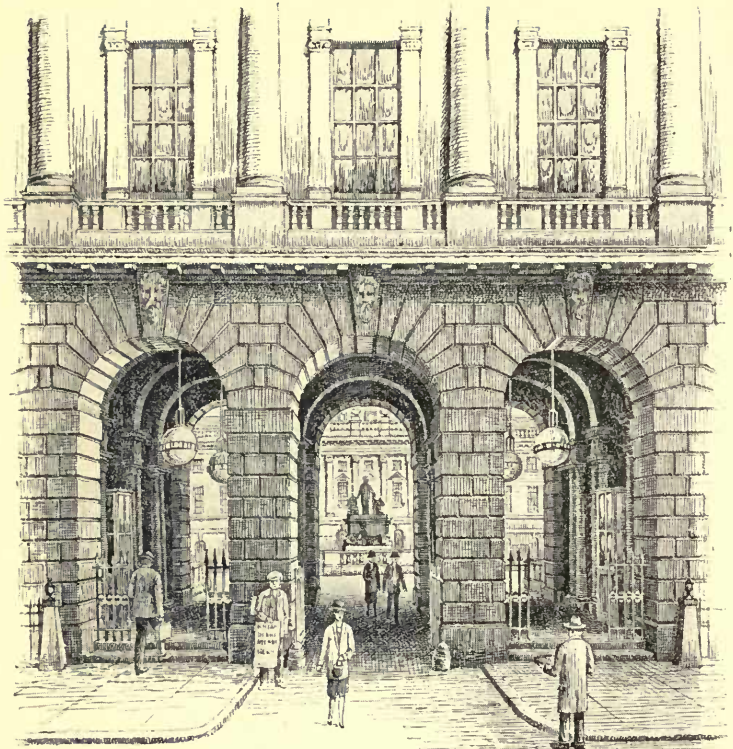
BOOKS BY
ST JOHN ADCOCK

Collected Poems

*"The Bookman" Treasury of
Living Poets.* Edited by
ST. JOHN ADCOCK



HODDER AND
STOUGHTON
LTD LONDON



F. Ed. Adcock.

SOMERSET HOUSE FROM THE STRAND.

LONDON
MEMORIES

by
ST. JOHN ADCOCK

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

by
FREDERICK ADCOCK

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
LIMITED LONDON
ST. PAUL'S HOUSE
WARWICK SQUARE

E. C.

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I

I HAPPENED to be born in London, and date my interest in its past from many years ago when I was very young and stood one night in Fleet Street to watch the workmen pulling down old Temple Bar by the flare of naphtha lamps ; and from a day in the same year when, before the new Law Courts were completed, I was taken to Westminster Hall and saw the Courts in session there as they had been all down the centuries ever since the Middle Ages.

By and by, not from any special study, but casually, in reading Langland's *Piers Plowman* and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, I gathered odds and ends of information about those days — such as that lawyers and judges were originally monks and high ecclesiastics (probably because they were then the only class that could read and write), and that when the Law became a wholly secular profession the lawyers, with their traditional respect for precedent, adopted wigs in order to perpetuate the shaven crown of the

priest. From the same poets, or the footnotes of their editors, I learned that the little black cap the judge puts on when he pronounces sentence of death is not worn to emphasise the solemnity of the occasion, but is another legacy from the Law's monkish ancestry – the original judge, being a priest, was forbidden to take life, so when he was sending a man to the gallows he covered his tonsure with the little black cap, to intimate that, for the time being, his holy office was in suspense and he was acting in his judicial capacity only.

In these and scores of ways (for many equally ancient customs survive among us) it was borne in upon me that, instead of having been left far behind out of sight, mediæval London was still near enough to us to be visited again, with the aid of that average imagination which belongs to everybody, whenever we care to go there.

To get back to London of the Middle Ages you must, as William Morris has said,

Forget six counties overhung with smoke,
Forget the snorting steam and piston stroke,
Forget the spreading of the hideous town,
Think rather of the pack-horse on the down,
And dream of London small and white and clean,
The clear Thames bordered by its gardens green,

and anchored below bridge a few strange sailing-ships that have come from far seas with cargoes of spice, and wine, and cloth of gold,

While nigh the thronged wharf, Geoffrey Chaucer's pen
Moves over bills of lading.

You must, of course, forget numerous other things, including motor-cars, buses, policemen, postmen, telephones, wireless, tubes, and the crush and noisy chaos of traffic in the streets. But with all the changes that have come over the place, if you could bring back some Londoner of the Middle Ages – say Chaucer himself – and set him down in St. Paul's Churchyard, though he might not at first glance know where he was, he would not have been looking round for many minutes before he recognised that he was home again.

Our St. Paul's is a comparatively new building, and pedlars and merchants are not allowed to transact business in its central aisle ; but its name would be pleasantly familiar, and just round the corner he would step into Cheapside – Chepe or West Chepe when he knew it – not now the wide, picturesque market thoroughfare it used to be, but still alive with memories of its early market days in the names of some of its

ways and by-ways, as Milk Street, Bread Street, Friday Street (where the fish was sold), Wood Street, Ironmonger Lane, Honey Lane Market, Poultry ; and having seen by a glance up King Street that a Guildhall still stood where it did, a little past Poultry he would arrive in Cornhill. He would miss the pillory which used to stand beside an earlier Royal Exchange, but Cornhill (with an old St. Peter's Church on it in place of the older one of his day) still leads to Leadenhall Street, at the corner of which, when he last saw it, was Sir Hugh Neville's manor house, Leaden Hall.

If he turned off southward here, along Gracechurch Street, Chaucer would presently be in Thames Street, where he was born, and where, as a Customs clerk, he had toiled over bills of lading on one of the wharves. From there he could take what may very well have been his accustomed road homeward — past the end of London Bridge (not his old London Bridge, which had a quaint huddle of shops and houses stretching across on both sides of it ; but a London Bridge close to the site of his), up Eastcheap, which has not altered its name, through Mark Lane (which he knew as Mart Lane), into Fenchurch Street, and so round into Aldgate, where he lived in rooms over the Gate. The

lease for life on which he held those rooms is still preserved at the Record Office.

2

While Chaucer lived over Aldgate, his great contemporary, William Langland, lived with his wife, Kate, and his daughter in a cottage on Cornhill, and earned a livelihood by singing anniversary dirges at that Church of St. Peter's upon Cornhill whose present-day successor is hemmed in between big business premises and forgets the days when the hill was rural enough to have cottages scattered among its shops.

Chaucer's other contemporary poet, John Gower, was a country gentleman, owning land in Kent, Sussex, and Essex. But, for the last eleven years of his life, being blind, Gower came to London and retired into some rooms at the Priory of St. Mary Overies, Southwark, close to the southern end of London Bridge. There he died and was buried in 1408, and the monks made a tomb for him on which they carved his effigy, and that painted tomb remains now in the Church of St. Saviour, which rose on the foundation of the priory. Eight years before the death of Gower, Chaucer had died in his new home at Westminster, a little higher up

the river, and his tomb is there in the Abbey.

Westminster then had not begun to be a part of London, but was a separate city, and the Strand, a kind of field path starting at Temple Bar, which was then only a chain hung across the road with the stocks near by it, ran to the Cross at Charing and wound round to the Abbey and the king's palace. Everywhere our man returned from the Middle Ages would have clues to his whereabouts. The streets off the Strand and Fleet Street are named after palaces, mansions, and monasteries that Chaucer would remember. He had stayed with his patron, John of Gaunt, at the Savoy Palace in the Strand; Covent Garden sufficiently suggests the garden of the convent that used to be there; in Strand Lane there is still the Roman Bath that is a relic of the days long past when the Romans were London's masters. In between such outstanding landmarks as Westminster Abbey, on the one hand, and, on the other, the Tower, which has dominated the eastern end of the city ever since William the Conqueror brought it into being, there are also the old Temple Church, in which some of the Crusaders have their tombs; the Church of St. Bartholomew, in Smithfield, built when Henry I was king; there is the quaint little

Church of St. Ethelburga, in Bishopsgate Street Within, which like the older St. Helen's, two minutes' walk away from it, was of some antiquity when Chaucer was a young man. And, to say nothing of other churches, there is in Cannon Street (whose first name was Candlewyck Street) that London Stone, another relic of the Romans, which is preserved in a niche in the front of St. Swithin's Church ; and not far off is the narrow street of Walbrook, commemorating the brook of that name which had an inlet through London's wall near Moorgate, and ran right across the city down this way to the Thames.

To go on for a minute picking up these clues, all the chief gates of the mediæval city have bequeathed their names to the streets on which they opened. The city wall, originally built by the Romans, ran along the river front from the Tower, with posterns at Billingsgate, Dowgate, and elsewhere, and, turning inland at Blackfriars, stretched down what is now New Bridge Street, with the River Fleet flowing past it to the Thames. On the opposite bank of the Fleet was the palace of Bridewell, and a substantial bridge spanned that river to link Fleet Street with Ludgate Hill. The city wall sloped up the hill by Pilgrim Street, and Lud Gate barred the

road between our present-day City and Midland Bank there and the eastern corner of Old Bailey.

More curiously fascinating than London's association with famous persons are, I think, the casual references by contemporary writers to certain of that multitude of forgotten men who made up most of the life of the city ; these have an unpremeditated homely touch that brings a scene or a character before you with a peculiar intimacy. One such reference in the Paston Letters I like to remember when I am passing where Lud Gate stood. In a letter from Norwich to his mother, who was on a visit to London, young John Paston wrote, "Also, mother, I beseech you that there may be purveyed some mean that I might have sent me home by the same messenger two pair of hose, one pair black and another pair of russett, which be ready made for me at the hosier's with the crooked back next to the Black Friars' gate within Ludgate. I beseech you that this gear be not forgotten, for I have not an whole hose to don ; I trow they shall cost, both pair, 8s." You may safely locate this shop at the top of Water Lane, for a few yards down the lane was the Black Friars' gate, and the Black Friars' monastery and grounds spread all about the neighbourhood of Printing House Square.



OLD HOUSES—MILK STREET, CHEAPSIDE
RECENTLY DEMOLISHED

Curious, on what trivial chances life depends. Other and more important fifteenth-century shops are lost from Ludgate Hill, but that shop of the humpbacked little hosier, just within the gate, still lights up its window in literature wholly because young John Paston's stockings had so many holes in them that he could not wear them any longer and, on a day in 1436, wrote that urgent letter to his mother for some new ones.

From Ludgate, the city wall traversed the Old Bailey to Newgate Street ; thence, taking in the Friary of the Grey Friars, now supplanted by the buildings of the Post Office, it turned eastward to Aldersgate ; thence by Barbican to Cripplegate ; down London Wall to Moorgate ; farther along London Wall and Wormwood Street to Bishopsgate ; up the side of Houndsditch, which was the ditch in front of the wall, to Aldgate, and by way of Minories to the Tower, and so to the Thames again. That square mile shut in by the wall was the whole of Chaucer's London, except for what were known as the Liberties of the borough of Southwark, and the outer areas between the wall and the bar in Fleet Street and the bar in Holborn, which were under the City's jurisdiction.

The smallness of this London must have made

life in it much what life is to-day in our little country towns, where nearly everybody knows nearly everybody else ; it was a leisurely, neighbourly place where friendly things might happen that seem impossible in the huge, swarming modern city. It is inconceivable that, nowadays, our King, taking the air in a barge on the Thames, should come across John Masefield, or Alfred Noyes, pulling along in a boat, and invite him aboard and, in the course of a sociable chat, urge him to write a poem. Yet that is what happened to John Gower. In the first version of his *Confessio Amantis* he says,

In Thames when it was flowing
As I by boat came rowing—

he passed a barge in which King Richard II was seated, and in obedience to the royal command he climbed on to the King's vessel and, after they had talked at large, Richard bade him write a book in English, and accordingly, as he writes in his prologue to his poem,

In our English I think to make
A book for King Richard's sake.

His earlier books were written in French or Latin, English being the language of the vulgar, and it was Richard's sensible advice that led

him to follow Chaucer's less scholarly example and write his *Confessio* in his native tongue. We and he may be grateful to the King for that, but Richard did not turn out well, and in a later version of the poem Gower deleted all reference to him, except to record that

In our English I think to make
A book for England's sake,
In the year sixteen of King Richard.

That sketch of himself and the King on the Thames is the only London picture I remember in Gower's poems ; but there are many revelations of London life and character in the poems of Chaucer and Langland, and in those of Lydgate and Occleve, their younger contemporaries.

3

Chaucer was the Court poet ; had been employed on diplomatic services, held public offices, and in his later years received a pension from the Crown. He makes no mention of the Peasant Revolt which, while he was busy writing the *Canterbury Tales* here, sent a desperate army of rebels to fight their way into London under Wat Tyler. He shows no concern for the

wrongs under which the common people of the period suffered. You come to know him as a genial, kindly soul, with an abounding sense of humour, finding the world a pleasant place, in spite of domestic and financial troubles that occasionally disturbed him. Even when he satirises the immoralities and hypocrisies of the clergy, the rascalities rampant in commerce, in the law, in medicine, he does not satirise them with any passion of indignation, but with a sly amusement or laughing contempt. On the whole, he paints that side of things which has moved us to label England of the Middle Ages "Merry England." He is less interested in the misery and oppression of the poor than in the jollity of the London prentices, telling you with gusto how the prentices delighted in the royal and other pageants that frequently filled the streets with gaiety ; how at the first sound of an approaching procession they would break away from their duties, in defiance of their masters, and there was no getting them back to their shops till they had seen all the show and grown tired of dancing and rioting in the wake of it. His prentice is a lively, lawless fellow, who, as he says, "loved better the tavern than the shop," and would be off to sing and hop at every bridal.

One of the *Canterbury Tales* – the Tale of the Canon's Yeoman – is entirely a London story. The Canon and his man, arriving at the Tabard Inn, in Southwark, too late to set out for Canterbury with the rest of the pilgrims, rode after them with such speed that when they overtook them their horses were foaming and covered with sweat. The jolly host of the Tabard, the conductor of the party, was curious – it was his nature to be curious – about the two new arrivals and questioned the yeoman as to his master – Is he a clerk – that is, a parson – or what is he? The yeoman explained that his master was greater than a clerk, he was a Canon of the Church, and so rich that he could, if he would, pave the road to Canterbury with gold. Why, then, demands mine host, is his cloak so shabby and ragged?

Why is thy lord so sluttish, I thee pray,
And is of power better clothes to buy?

Thereupon, the yeoman, after some hesitation, confesses that his master is a mean scoundrel; that he swindles people by pretending he has the secret of turning baser metals into silver and gold, and he, the yeoman, is weary of this villainy, for it yields him little and his face has become shamefully discoloured (on which

discoloration the host had already commented) through blowing with his breath the fires over which his master does his fraudulent conjuring. The Canon, overhearing scraps of their conversation, drops back to threaten his man with punishment if he dares to slander him, but the yeoman, encouraged by mine host, boasts defiantly that he is not afraid, and, after the Canon has ridden angrily ahead again, says he will tell all, and begins :

In London was a priest, an annualer

– that is, a secular priest who, like Langland on Cornhill, was employed to sing masses for the dead on the anniversaries of their deaths –

In London was a priest, an annualer,
That therein dwelled hadde many a year,

a pleasant man, in short, and comfortably well off ; and the yeoman proceeds to relate how the Canon called on this priest and requested the loan of one mark, pledging himself to return it within three days without fail. The priest lent him the mark, and promptly on the third day the Canon called and repaid it.

Whereof the priest was wonder glad and fain,
very much as a lender is to-day if he is similarly

lucky in getting his money back. The borrowing and repayment was a trick of the Canon's to inspire confidence, but he affects to be wounded by the glad surprise of the priest and assures him, with dignity,

Truth is a thing that I will ever keep
Unto that day on which that I shall creep
Into my grave.

Moreover, to prove his gratitude, he offers to do a mystery and teach the good priest how profitably he may work in philosophy. "Let your man go and buy two or three ounces of quicksilver," he says, "and I will show you a wonder you have never seen before." The quicksilver is fetched, a fire is lighted, and the priest is set to stoop and blow it while the Canon operates with the quicksilver and some water in a pan. At the right moment, when the water is steaming, he slips into the pan a small ingot of real silver which he had hidden up his sleeve, and then, with anxious excitement, urges the priest to dip into the pan and find what is there. The priest fumbles in the pan and, "glad in every vein," brings out the ingot of silver, and blesses God and his mother, and wants to know how it was done. To oblige him, the Canon repeats the experiment, but still the priest

cannot see how to do it ; so the Canon asks for some copper, and goes to work with this and by the same trickery, having covertly snatched the copper from the pan, leaves the priest to fish out a third silver ingot. Calming the eagerness of the still mystified victim, the Canon, with an air of integrity, proposes that they shall take the three ingots to a goldsmith and have them tested ; and when the goldsmith has declared the ingots genuine silver,

This sotted priest – who gladder was than he ?
Was never bird gladder against the day ;
“ For the love of God,” he says, “ that for all died,
And as I may deserve it unto you,
What shall this receipt cost ? ”

The Canon is reluctant, and warns him it is very dear, for only himself and one other in all England can do this wonder. But as the priest insists, he tells him the recipe will cost forty pounds, and but for his friendly service in lending the mark the price would be much higher. The forty pounds (equal to two or three hundred nowadays) change hands, and, having adjured the priest to keep the process secret, the Canon gives him a worthless formula for turning copper into silver or gold and bids him farewell. And ending with

He went his way, and never the priest him saw
After that day,

the yeoman starts to moralise on this villainy, but as there is no more story, the jovial host, who does not want any moral, dismisses his sober comments with, "Ye, let that pass," and calls on another pilgrim for a tale about honest matters.

There were genuine alchemists in those days, scientists who experimented in secret at the transmutation of metals, and when they were found out they were prosecuted for wizardry and severely punished. But there were plenty of bogus alchemists who, like the Canon, used their skill for swindling the credulous. Pardoners were going about, as you may learn from Chaucer and Langland, peddling spurious pardons and dispensations from the Pope; secular dealers selling charms and amulets to keep off or cure diseases. Riley's *Memorials of London* chronicles, among others, the case of a German, Henry Pott, who by sorcery and black magic, for value received, undertook to ascertain who had stolen Nicholas Freeman's silver cup; but when, after making mystic passes over several balls of clay, he denounced Nicholas's wife, Cristina, as the thief, both she and Nicholas

were so outraged that they had him up before the Lord Mayor, who sentenced Henry to stand for an hour in the pillory.

But we have so many well-patronised palmists, crystal-gazers, and miracle-mongers in *our* midst that I don't think we can throw stones at the sorcerers of the Middle Ages. As for Chaucer's Canon, an adaptation of his trick was successfully practised only a few years ago in Hatton Garden, when a plausible rogue, possibly a descendant of the Canon himself, hoodwinked that astute millionaire, Sir Julius Wernher, by apparently transforming lumps of coal into real diamonds, and he had pocketed quite a lot of his dupe's cash for carrying on experiments before Sir Julius detected him deftly dropping natural diamonds into his crucible, and sent for the police. So, one way and another, though brick and mortar London has undergone radical changes, it would seem that humanity in London to-day is not so very different from what it used to be.

4

If it is better in some respects, it is as bad or worse in others, as you may have felt when you read some of the evidence given not long since

before the Food Commission. We have our food inspectors, but so they had in the Middle Ages, and their methods of dealing with fraudulent tradesmen were more effective than ours. Riley's chronicles, again, have accounts extracted from the Guildhall registers of how a baker found guilty of making loaves that were of light weight was drawn through the streets on a hurdle ; of how John Russell had exposed for sale in Billingsgate thirty-seven pigeons that were " putrid, rotten, stinking and abominable to the human race, to the scandal, contempt and disgrace of the city," and on the evidence of two pie-bakers and five cooks, who were sworn to inspect those pigeons, and whose names are duly recorded, John was put in the pillory and his birds were burnt under his nose. John Edmond, for trying to sell in the market of Grass Church Street, which we call Gracechurch, a sack of oats which were of poor quality underneath, but had a bushel of good oats carefully spread on top, also had to do penance in the pillory. For spreading false news to the scandal of the city, Nicholas Mollere was put in the pillory with a whetstone hung round his neck, according to the remedy provided " for such liars." I have a fancy that this Mollere may have been the first journalist - a kind of

thwarted pioneer, born before there were any newspapers. Another baker, Robert Porter, of Stratford, was found, in 1387, in the market of Cheapside, selling a loaf with a piece of iron in it to increase its weight, and he had to stand in the Cornhill pillory with the loaf and the piece of iron hanging round his neck. Chaucer and Langland may have heard of or seen William Wottone, a butcher, carrying on business at the shambles in Newgate Street – he was, in 1388, impertinent to an Alderman who rebuked him because his meat was too dear, and the Lord Mayor sentenced him to six months in Newgate Prison, and, on his release, to walk, with head uncovered, bare legs, and carrying a lighted candle that weighed a pound, through the Newgate Street shambles, on through Cheapside, as far as St. Lawrence Lane, and up that lane to the chapel of the Guildhall, where he was to make an offering of his candle at one of the shrines. You can imagine the crowd that watched him on his pilgrimage, and you can follow the course he took with his flaring candle, and, though the houses he saw as he went are all replaced by others, as you pass the same streets he passed, which still bear their old names, toward the Guildhall, you have such an odd sense of nearness to him that it seems

incredible there are no longer any slaughter-houses in Newgate Street, and that William has gone from the market there, and the market from the street, leaving only their tales behind them.

Similar instances of tradesmen giving short weight, putting their prices too high, and selling bad food are far too plentiful in the records of that time, and if you read the newspapers you will know they will be far too plentiful in the records of our time. And I sometimes wish we had not encouraged our own sinners by removing the pillory from Cornhill and the stocks from Temple Bar. If we could see some of the hard-faced men of commerce who nowadays grow rich by charging us too much for too little – if we could see them sitting with their legs in the one or standing with their necks in the other we should, at least, get a show for our money.

Stow will tell you, in his invaluable *Survey*, how firmly and freely those simple remedies for petty trickery were applied. Chaucer, in our modern spirit, often lets his rogues go unpunished; but happily he offers us specimens of some of the best as well as some of the worst characters of his day. There was the knight among his pilgrims, for instance, gentle, courteous, brave, a perfect mirror of chivalry; there

was that very human woman the prioress, who spoke French after the school of Stratford-atte-Bowe, and was simple and coy, fond of animals, charitable, sentimental, tender-hearted. There was a merchant, a carpenter, a haberdasher, a dyer, who must have been decent citizens or he would have enjoyed telling us otherwise. There were that sinful wife of Bath and some wanton monks, but there was also that good parson who taught Christ's law, "but first," we are told significantly, "he followed it himself." The Falstaffian host of the Tabard objected to moral reflections, but was a worthy enough man, easy-going, tolerant of human error, and sound at heart, portly, merry, outspoken, and, according to Chaucer,

A fairer burgess was there none in Chepe.

His genial, robust personality pervades the whole pilgrimage from its start in that magical April month when —

Befel that in that season on a day
In Southwark at the Tabard as I lay,

says Chaucer, nine and twenty guests arrived and fell into fellowship, for "pilgrims were they all." He had supper with them, made himself

one of them, and has introduced most of them minutely in the prologue to the *Tales*. Next morning, at daylight, the host roused them,

And gathered us together in a flock
And forth we riden -

and in the freshness of that eternal spring morning, Chaucer, the whimsical host, and all their flock have been riding from the Tabard up Southwark High Street and the Old Kent Road, through all the centuries since, and will so go riding for ever. A new Tabard Inn has supplanted the old one ; the Midland Railway has turned the inn yard into a receiving office for goods ; yet to this day the ground belongs to the old inn and the pilgrims more really than to the new inn and the railway yard, which will fade out of mind at last, when they fade out of sight, as the old inn and the old-time pilgrims will never fade.

Always it is the spirit that endures, and the material man, the material building, that vanishes like a shadow.

5

Consider how many millions, since the Romans built its wall, have lived in London, made its

streets alive with their voices and footsteps, and fallen silent and gone out of it, and their places know them no more. Yet we are still aware of the tall, sombre figure of William Langland (he tells you himself he was so tall he was known as Long Will) going up and down Cornhill between his cottage and the Church of St. Peter's. Langland was born about 1332; he was educated in a monastery at Malvern, and relates in his *Vision of Piers Plowman* how he slept and had a dream on the Malvern Hills. But he wrote the story of his dream in the London cottage where he lived with his wife, and, when he had finished writing it, says,

Then I awaked, God wot, when I lived on Cornhill,
Kytte and I in a cot ;

and goes on to tell how, because he dressed in shabby monkish robes, and because the writing of poetry seemed to them an idle pastime, his neighbours held him in little esteem and regarded him as a loafer. But he was indifferent, and admits it was the only kind of life he cared for, and adds with a hint of satire that by his singing in the church he was living in London and *on* London both; for he never seems to have made any money by his poetry. Like

other poets of his period, he denounces the greed, licentiousness, worldliness of the priesthood, but does it in fierce earnest, and you find in him what you miss in Chaucer – passion of sympathy with the poor and unfortunate. Like Chaucer, he touches in little sketches of the general life of London. I like to think of him wandering down Cornhill with his thoughts full of his great poem, and you may depend that in such wanderings he noticed many a guilty trader from Chepe, Newgate, or Billingsgate market in the pillory there, and probably it was the sight of them that prompted him to write feelingly of

Mayors and officers of justice that are mean between
 The king and the commune to keep the laws,
 To punish on pillories and penitent stools
 Brewers and bakers, butchers and cooks,
 For these are men on this earth that work most harm
 To the poor people who buy in small quantities,
 For they poison the people privilie and oft,
 And grow rich through buying cheap and selling dear.

Unfortunately, in his *Piers Plowman* Langland does not always deal with flesh and blood humanity. He is fond of personifying the virtues and vices, and on one occasion, much as Chaucer took his pilgrims to Canterbury, he

brings a whole procession of vices up to Westminster Hall to lay a case before the King and ask him to do justice between them. And though other vices have to fly to evade arrest, it is significant of the times that the maid Mede, who personifies bribery and self-interest, finds a multitude of friends at Court, and her favours are sought by lawyers, priests, and all the most respectable people.

On a later occasion, when he is personifying one of the Seven Deadly Sins – that of Gluttony – Langland introduces a most graphic picture of contemporary tavern life. The time has come, he says, for Gluttony to repent and amend, and

Now beginnith Glutton for to go to shrift,
And went him to kirkward his sin for to shew.

But Beton the brewster bade him good morrow,
And asked of him with that whitherward he would.

“To holy church,” quoth he, “for to hear mass,
And then I will be shriven and sin no more.”

“I have good ale, gossip,” quoth she. “Glutton,
wilt thou try it?”

He temporises, but the lady – for, like many ale-house keepers then, Beton was a woman – persuades him to break his good resolution.

Then goeth Glutton in, and great others after :
 Cicely the shoemaker sat on a bench,
 Watt the warrener and his wife both,
 Tymme the tinker and two of his prentis,
 Hick the hostler, and Hugh the needle-seller,
 Clarice of Cock Lane, and the clerk of the church,
 Dawe the ditcher, and a dozen other,
 A fiddler, a rat-catcher, a scavenger of Chepe,
 A rope-maker, a soldier, and Rose the metal dish maker,
 Godfrey of Garlickhithe, and Griffin the Welshman,
 And ragmen a heap, early in the morning
 Gave Glutton with glad cheer good ale as a treat.

The sketch of the group in the tavern and of their doings is as minutely realistic as a Dutch painting. You have the names of most of them, and the addresses of some, and they represent various types of worker common in fourteenth-century London. Dawe the ditcher had, I take it, come in from working in the fields outside the city wall, and the scavenger from clearing up Cheapside before the market opened. Godfrey of Garlickhithe and Griffin the Welshman had dropped in casually, as if they were such familiar figures about town there was no need to say more of them. A lively episode follows – a typical picture of the time – in which Clement the cobbler, to raise money for drink, puts up his cloak for auction ; Hick the hostler offers

his hood in exchange, and Robin the roper, Bat the butcher, and a jury of pedlars decide that the exchange shall be made, but as the hood is the more valuable article of the two, Clement shall stand Hick the hostler a drink to make it level, and if either repudiates the bargain he shall pay for a gallon of ale for Glutton. "There was laughing and scowling and 'pass round the cup,'" the poem goes on, "and there they sat singing till evensong"; when Glutton, going home, burdened with more than his gallon, stumbled at the threshold and fell into the street. Clement the cobbler picked him up, and his wife and daughter were sent for, and

With all the woe of this world his wife and his wench
Bare him home to his bed and brought him therein ;

and having slept all Saturday and Sunday (of course the ale he had been drinking was long pre-war), he woke in the evening and "the first word that he breathed was 'Where is the bowl?'" But his wife began at once to reproach him with his wickedness, and, allegory getting back into the story, Repentance comes and lectures him, and urges him to be ashamed and mend his ways. Then Glutton owns he has been in the habit of eating on fast days and

using bad language, has persistently slept too much, and drunk too much "for love of tales and taverns," and vows to do penance and fast to such an extent that he will not even eat fish on Fridays.

Till Abstinence, my aunt, have given me leave,
And yet have I hated her all my life.

That touch of the old Adam which prompts him to utter his hatred of his aunt, Abstinence, in the midst of his remorse, his whole conduct, indeed, through this episode, make Glutton so much like so many men that it lifts him out of allegory, and humanises him until he is real as the actual men who formed the rest of the group in the tavern. I wish Langland had given that tavern a name. There are plausible reasons for assuming that it was the Boar's Head, Eastcheap, afterwards made famous by Shakespeare and Falstaff, and I am willing to believe it. The Boar's Head used to stand on the spot now occupied by King William's statue, facing London Bridge, and anyhow this would be within easy reach of Langland's cottage on Cornhill and of the home of Godfrey of Garlickhithe, for Garlickhithe is, you know, still near by in Cannon Street. The period of Shakespeare's Henry comes so closely after Langland's

period that the hostess of the Boar's Head who served Langland as the original of his Mistress Beton may well have been the same who served Shakespeare for Mistress Quickly, and had Falstaff, Bardolph, and the Prince among her customers. But to Shakespeare they were history two hundred years old, and to Langland they were people next door or round the corner.

6

There is much more about London in Langland's *Piers Plowman*, but I want to pass over a few years and come to another poet, Thomas Occleve, who, like Chaucer, was a born Londoner. Occleve had intended to be a priest, but failing to get a benefice, married, and secured an appointment in the Privy Seal Office. He was thirty when Chaucer and Langland died, and lived at Chester Inn, one of the smaller inns of Court, which stood in the Strand until it had to make way for Somerset House. He registers his address at the opening of his poem on "The Duty of Princes":

At Chester Inn, right fast by the Strand,
As I lay in bed upon a night
Thought me bereft of sleep.

In the course of the poem, he takes occasion to remind King Henry V that he is a Government servant and his salary is in arrear. At a later date, you find him writing a special poem to the Baron of the Exchequer calling his attention to the same sad fact, and informing him that he and his three fellow-clerks, whom he mentions by name, are sorely in need of their wages, and hope he will see that they are paid and

Now give us cause again this Christmas
For to be glad ;

and he concludes :

We your servants Occlve and Baily,
Heath and Offorde you beseech and pray
Hasten our harvest as soon as you may.

This naming of his fellow-sufferers, though they are now nothing but names to us, gives such a touch of realism to the lines that you can fancy those four clerks in the office reading the poem together before it was dispatched and speculating on its possible effect. But as Occlve ends another and longer poem, "Occlve's Misrule," with a similar, more pathetic appeal, saying he is ill and starving and if only he may have his overdue salary he

can buy medicines that will save him, it does not look as if his petitions were successful, and suggests that our Civil Servants had something to grumble about even five hundred years ago. "The Duty of Princes," written in 1411, informs you that Occleve had been in the office of the Privy Seal "twenty-four years come Easter, and that is near"; and in "Occleve's Misrule" he reveals the recreations and dissipations with which he solaced his leisure, before there were any theatres or night clubs for him to go to. He admits that he had been given to eating and drinking outrageously for twenty winters past; he could not resist the tavern sign, and revelled in all the loose living of the town. No one was better known than he, he says, to the cooks and innkeepers at Westminster Gate; and sometimes, on a summer's day, he would go into a tavern and eat and drink so well and unwisely that when he came out he was in no mood to go back to the office, but walked to the bridge and hired a boat. You can picture him, as you read, emerging from the inn, turning his back on the office, and strolling not too steadily to the bridge—not London Bridge, London's only one, but a jetty that, near the site of our Westminster Bridge, ran well out into the river, with steps running

down from it to the boats. Here one of the boatmen, who knew him well, took charge of him and rowed him to and fro till he was soberer. Drinking and gaming and other sports swallowed his money, and he assures you that there was nobody in the Privy Seal to equal him at such diversions. It is all one of the simplest, frankest things in the way of poetical autobiography that has come down to us, and furnishes a vivid and sufficient notion of the few but deplorable forms of amusement available to the London clerk of the Middle Ages who wanted to go the pace.

7

John Lydgate, another poet, a year or two Occleve's junior, was, I hope, a more decorous person. He was a monk of Bury St. Edmunds, but knew London fairly well, and as a result of one of his visits wrote a poem describing Henry VI's entry into the city by Temple Bar, after his coronation at Westminster. He was a voluminous writer, but most of his poetry sleeps with Occleve's in Black Letter. Certainly, nothing he wrote has had anything like the popularity enjoyed by his "London Lackpenny," the ballad in which he has set down with a careless

graphic realism what he saw and heard of mediæval London, when nearly every private and public house of importance flaunted its pictorial signboard, and when in broad market streets and narrow by-ways traders or their prentices stood in their doorways or outside their shops crying their wares, much as they do still in poorer quarters of the town on Saturday nights, or in Petticoat Lane on Sunday; though nowadays they have abandoned the habit of laying hands on the passer-by and trying to force him to become a customer. Into that old London, Lydgate brings his countryman, up out of Kent to appeal for justice at Westminster Hall against a man who has defrauded him. His cloak is stolen in the crowd before he reaches the Hall; and in the Courts he can get no justice because he has no money to pay lawyers, and justice was not given away even then. At length, in despair, he quits the Hall and rambles off to see the sights. The cooks about Westminster Gate spread their tables in the street for him, but he cannot afford to patronise them. He makes his way into London, where salesmen vainly offer him peas and strawberries, cherries and spices, as he goes by. He arrives in Cheapside, which is thronged with people, and as he passes stalls and

shops he is entreated to buy velvet, silk, and lawn, and one shopman grasps him by the hand and endeavours to sell him "Paris thread, the finest in the land." He presses on, he tells you, by London Stone and through Candlewyck Street, where drapers and others pester him with cloth, hot sheep's feet, mackerel, and a hood to cover his head. Then he goes into Eastcheap, a noted place for cookshops and taverns, and here he is assailed with cries of ribs of beef and all kinds of pie, and there is clattering of pewter pots, and music of harp and pipe, and singing of popular songs. But he has not enough money for anything, and even when among the second-hand clothes shops in Cornhill he sees his own cloak that was stolen at Westminster hung out for sale, he has no means of buying it or getting it back. Hereabouts a taverner seizes hold of him and urges him to step inside and try his wine, and, this being more than he could resist, he went in and had a pint for a penny, but came away hungry, having spent his all. At Billingsgate he prayed a boatman who was just putting off to carry him across the river free of charge, but the boatman was no philanthropist ; so appealing to heaven to save London and send true lawyers their reward, says the harassed countryman, "I

conveyed me into Kent," from which you may take it that he plodded away homeward over London Bridge.

Those street scenes of Lydgate give a good and reliable idea of the London that he knew, and are in harmony with the tradition that it was a busy, a varied, and a lively London. Though theatres had not yet come into existence, moralities and miracle plays were acted in inn yards, in churches, and on such open spaces as Clerkenwell Green. It had changed little since Fitzstephen, describing twelfth-century London in which he lived, wrote of the sports that were going on nearly all the year round on Moorfields, outside Moorgate, where there was leaping, wrestling, shooting with the bow, casting the stone, playing at ball, when, like our football crowds, the citizens, including ancient and wealthy men, came streaming out through Moorgate to do what their descendants are considered degenerate for doing and look on at the game. There were sham fights in the fields, and burlesque water battles on the Thames; there was dancing on the greens of summer evenings, when, as Fitzstephen notes, "the maidens tripped it to their timbrels as long as they could well see"; and on May Day, in Leadenhall Street, by the Church of St. Andrew Undershaft,

and in the Strand, opposite what is now Somerset House, and in other streets, the garlanded maypole was put up and there were music and dancing round it all day, and round it of evenings for days after. There were splendid pageants and triumphant shows, and at intervals a gallant tournament was held in Cheapside ; and at Christmas the Lord of Misrule came forth, says Fitzstephen, with reputable citizens on horseback, " disguised in a mummerly, with sound of trumpets, sackbuts, cornets, shawns, and other minstrelsy, rising through the streets with boisterous riot and merriment." Such uproar and obstructions in the principal thoroughfares are unthinkable in modern London, which has even passed laws to silence the muffin bell.

8

But there was a dark and tragic side to all that gaiety. The notion that London was a better place in the good old times is a strange delusion. Murders and robberies with violence increased at intervals, and made the ill-lighted, ill-guarded streets so perilous that a special watch had to tour the city with torches, hunting after brutal wretches who never emerged from their hiding-places till after dark.

The houses were built largely of wood and roofed with straw, and fires were frequent and terrible. And though it may have looked pleasant and picturesque with the Fleet flowing past its western wall, and Wallbrook, now dwindled to a street, rippling all across the city, rivers and brooks were used freely for sewage, the whole place was insanitary, often very un-savoury, and outbreaks of plague were not uncommon. In less than thirty years, between 1348 and 1376, four great pestilences raged in London and all over the country, and after the worst of these, the Black Death, the population was so decimated that there was a serious scarcity of labourers ; the poor naturally being the worst sufferers in such calamities. Langland's *Piers Plowman* speaks of these plagues, and of the dreadful condition of serfdom and destitution in which the common people outside the towns were compelled to live. Consequently there was labour unrest then as now, and, then as now, those who were comfortable were indignant that a state of affairs which satisfied them was not satisfactory to everybody. But in the Middle Ages the masses had no representation in Parliament ; nobody had any interest in redressing their wrongs. They had no way of bringing about reforms except by rebellion –

one should have that in mind before condemning such of them as had the courage to rebel.

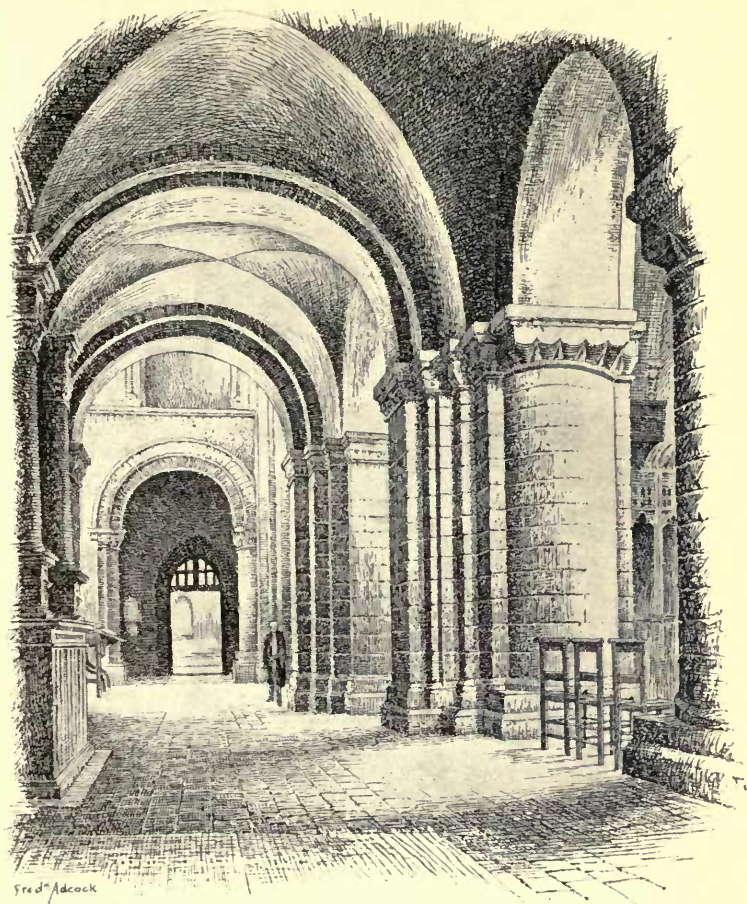
In the twelfth century, William Fitzosbert rose in London on behalf of the people who, he said, "have endured the hard hands of the rich." Nor was Fitzosbert one of the underdogs himself; he was a member of the City Council; had been a Crusader; seems to have been a religious man with a sense of justice. The sheriffs tried to arrest him while he was addressing crowds from the Cross in St. Paul's Churchyard, but his audience drove them away. When they trapped him in Cheapside, he and a few followers took sanctuary in Bow Church. But in defiance of sanctuary rights, the sheriffs fired the church, and as Fitzosbert and his friends dashed through the flames they were stabbed and struck down on the stones of Cheapside.

One tavern and a house or two in Smithfield, and a few houses in the tangle of lanes behind the church, have been standing there long enough to remember the annual glories of Bartholomew Fair. But nothing in Smithfield except the ancient church, and possibly one of the houses, looked down on the open space when it was covered with grass and saw the flames in which the martyrs burned; and the church alone goes back to earlier days when knights

and ladies came riding and glittering up Giltspur Street to the tournaments that were held there, Chaucer having an interest in one of the grand stands ; or to that day in 1381 when Wat Tyler marched his ragged army into Smithfield to meet the young King Richard II and parley with him for the rights of the common people.

Everybody knows the story of how, after the King had pledged himself to give the serfs freedom, to redress their grievances, and pardon the rebels, the patriotic Lord Mayor, Sir William Walworth, dashed forward and stabbed the leader in an unguarded moment, and the dying Wat was carried into the priory hospital of St. Bartholomew. After his leaderless followers had been persuaded to disperse, the King safely broke all his promises, and a number of the poor wretches were arrested and hanged.

But Wat Tyler was a courageous reformer, no rascal. Priests, like John Ball, and Wyckliffite preachers knew him and marched in his ranks ; and it was John Ball who raised the piteous cry : “ Why do they hold us in serfage ? They make us gain by our toil what they spend in their pride. They are warm in their furs and ermines while we are covered in rags.” Tyler threatened to hang any of his men who robbed or molested the citizens, and is said, as far as possible, to



ST. BARTHOLOMEW THE GREAT —
SMITHFIELD

have carried out his threat. They destroyed the Fleet Prison, in Farringdon Street ; burnt Newgate Prison, and freed the prisoners. They burnt out the lawyers in the Temple, and the Savoy Palace of their most ruthless enemy, John of Gaunt, in the Strand.

For me, Wat Tyler's unimpeachable witness lies buried south of London Bridge, in St. Saviour's Church. A dull poet, but a good man, "moral Gower" was then living in Kent, and some of the rebels were probably men who worked on his estate. But though Gower was a wealthy landowner, he knew what unendurable wrongs lay behind the Peasant Revolt, and wrote his *Vox Clamantis*, inspired by the Wat Tyler rebellion, to voice those unendurable wrongs and plead for justice. "I write the ills I see," he said, and, good churchman himself, he spared neither the time-serving clergy nor the tyrannous government in his solemn indictment.

With such a witness for them, you may be sure there was justification for the poverty-stricken mob which, before Tyler led it across London Bridge into the city, had halted on Blackheath, while John Ball preached to them and celebrated Mass. Ruffians led by a ruffian do not delay to attend to such details as these.

Another seventy years were gone when, in

1449, one year before that quarrel in Temple Gardens between the partisans of York and Lancaster which started the Wars of the Roses (Shakespeare has dramatised the scene in *Henry VI*), Jack Cade, again a Kentish man, marched on London with another army of rebels. He made his headquarters in Southwark, near the Tabard, at the White Hart Inn, which, centuries later, was to be the meeting-place of Mr. Pickwick and Sam Weller. He stormed London Bridge, and Shakespeare's *Henry VI* shows him striking his staff on that London Stone in Cannon Street. "Here, sitting on this London Stone," Shakespeare makes him say, "I charge and command that of the city's cost, the conduit run nothing but claret wine the first year of our reign"; and he announces that he will burn down London Bridge and the Tower. But Cade does not seem to have been any such ruffian as that. Shakespeare, for the purposes of his play, merely took his character and history from Hollinghead's *Chronicles*. So far as one can come at the facts, Jack Cade fairly negotiated with the City Fathers, and, while they were using their influences with the King, he withdrew his army from London, at their request, and returned to his headquarters at the White Hart. But no answer was sent across the river to him,

and when he advanced again the city, profiting by the delay, defended the bridge and defeated and drove him back. His disheartened followers broke up and dribbled away out of Southwark homeward. Cade was pursued, and died fighting the sheriff and his posse in a garden of Heathfield, in Sussex.

Without going to history, you may learn the whole story of the English peasant, from the Norman invasion down to our recent Great War, from Maurice Hewlett's epic, *The Song of the Plow*, which is too good to deserve the neglect into which it has fallen. Hewlett shows you all the burdens that were imposed on the labourers, the tyrannies that made their lives wretched. He gives you glimpses of Wat Tyler's temporary conquest of London, and a glimpse of how Jack Cade and his men of Kent

Brought battle over London Bridge
And hanged Lord Say,

their most merciless enemy, in Cheapside. Cade and Tyler and their comrades have been given a bad name. But one has to recollect that they were beaten, and their first historians were their enemies. That explains a good deal. I am not sure, anyhow, that it is more villainous in them to go fighting for justice to themselves and their

friends than for their kings, in pursuit of merely private ambitions, to waste the lives of thousands of humble folk in their Wars of the Roses, or, for the same private ends, to murder princely children, queens, and rival kings and turn the Tower of London into a shambles. Compared with all this butchery for petty personal profit, and judged in relation to their times, Tyler and Cade, to my thinking, make rather heroic figures. From John Skelton's *Colin Clout*, and from his greater contemporary, Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*, we may take it that all manner of corruption in high places, and of oppression and suffering in low places, were as rampant at the beginning of the sixteenth century as at the end of the fourteenth century, and that, on the whole, our mediæval rulers got the rebels they deserved, and some of the rebels deserved something better than they received.

9

I always feel that the Tower and West Smithfield are the eeriest, most grimly romantic parts of London. Not without reason, Gray stigmatised the Tower, in "The Bard," as

London's lasting shame,
With many a foul and midnight murder fed.

Kings, queens, and great nobles have been imprisoned and slaughtered within it, or beheaded on the hillside under its shadow. In Shakespeare's *Richard II* you have the story of how that king who was false to Wat Tyler was himself betrayed to destruction – not by his people but by a rival to his throne – and you see him being taken under guard to the Tower, while his weeping queen waits in the street to see him go by. Mortimer dies a pitiful prisoner there in *Henry VI*. But the play in which the Tower bulks most largely is *Richard III*, with the scene in which the Duke of Clarence is murdered and flung into the butt of malmsey; and the scene in which Richard, joining the Council in one of the chambers, dispatches the Bishop of Ely on a trivial errand, saying,

My Lord of Ely, when I was last in Holborn
I saw good strawberries in your garden there.
I do beseech you send for some of them.

There were strawberries, at that date, in many of the gardens in the semi-rural neighbourhood of the Bishop's Palace, whose site is still indicated by Ely Place, where the watchman still calls the hours all night, as he did then. But Richard only wanted the Bishop out of the way

while he had his opponent, Lord Hastings, arrested and sent to the block. There is that scene in the Tower where Gloucester and Buckingham plan the murder of the little princes ; and that more poignant scene outside when the queen mother of the princes is refused admittance to them.

But the Tower is crowded with more tragic memories of the Middle Ages than we have leisure to recall ; and so is Smithfield. In *Henry IV*, Falstaff is in Smithfield to buy a horse when Mistress Quickly has him arrested for debt at the corner of Giltspur Street. And Giltspur Street has greater glory than that. Its name is reminiscent of the magnificent tournaments held in the Middle Ages, when, as Stow tells us, knights armed for the jousts, and many ladies of honour, mounted on palfreys, rode from the Tower through the city, by way of Knightrider Street, or up the broad avenue of Cheapside, out by Ludgate or Newgate, and along this Giltspur Street into Smithfield. Smithfield then had a smaller Bartholomew Hospital on one side of it, St. Bartholomew Church on another, Cock Lane and Hosier Lane on the side facing the Hospital—all very much as now, except that grass grew over the central square, and there was no meat market. Here,

where grand stands were erected for the gentry and barriers to keep back the surging mob of sightseers, the knights, to a fanfare of trumpets, rode into the lists. Stow records some of these tourneys, especially one, in the reign of the third Edward, that lasted for seven days.

Here, too, in Smithfield, on a site preserved above the Midland Railway underground goods station, through the later half of the Middle Ages a multitude of martyrs were burned at the stake, most because they would not conform to Roman Catholic or Protestant dogmas which happened to be part of the State religion for the time being; some for quite mundane offences. To say nothing of more famous cases to be found in Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, there were scores of inglorious persons burned there for their faith – such as Andrew Hewet, prentice to Warren, a tailor in Watling Street, and Thomas Garet, a curate, who lived in Honey Lane Market, Cheapside, and somehow I am more curiously drawn to these forgotten men, with definite addresses about London that may still be visited, than to the noted martyrs whom all the world remembers. Yet among the notable and the unhonoured, none remains more in my memory than does Anne Askew. Poor Anne could not agree with the Bishop of London about

the doctrine of transubstantiation, so they stretched her on the rack in the Tower in the hope of altering her mind, but they only succeeded in altering her body to such an extent that she was unable to walk, and had to be carried to Smithfield in a chair. Three other obstinate heretics, bound to adjacent stakes, were doomed to suffer with her.

“The multitude and concourse of the people was exceeding,” writes Foxe, “the place where they stood being railed about to keep out the press. Upon the bench under St. Bartholomew Church sat Wrisley, Chancellor of England, the old Duke of Norfolk, the Lord Mayor, and divers more.” There was a little delay because these dignitaries were alarmed on hearing that gunpowder had been tied round the waists of the martyrs to put them sooner out of their agonies. They were afraid that when the powder exploded it might scatter the faggots and bring them flying about their ears. When their fears had been diminished by assurances that such an accident was impossible, the Lord Chancellor sent a letter to Anne Askew offering the King’s pardon even now at the eleventh hour if she would recant. Similar letters were given to the three martyrs beside her, but, says Foxe, “following the consistency of the woman,”

they refused to look at them. "Whereupon, the Lord Mayor, commanding fire to be put to them," Foxe adds, "cried with a loud voice, Fiat Justicia." And so the poor Anne and her fellow-victims, being compassed with flames, left the world in that fiery chariot in 1546.

I seldom cross Smithfield now without being haunted by that scene ; especially if I pass after dark, in the quiet that comes there with darkness, I can almost fancy that loud cry of the Lord Mayor's still echoes over the lonely open space, and can see, on that bench in front of the church which has survived them all materially, a shadowy group of elderly, stately, more or less cultured and important personages gravely looking on at a lawful exhibition which a later generation has come to regard with horror as altogether un-Christian and barbarous.

Anne Askew was burned fourteen years after the arrival of the Reformation ; for Protestant and Roman Catholic clergy burned dissenters impartially, when they had the power. Down to his death, a few years before the Reformation, Cardinal Wolsey was supporting Henry VIII in his revolt against the Pope, but there was truth as well as malice in the frank and fierce satire John Skelton, in his lively, tripping, impudent verses, poured upon the powerful

Cardinal. Skelton was Rector of Diss, in Norfolk, but had been Henry VIII's tutor, and was often in London at the Court. If he had not enjoyed the King's favour, he could not have gone on so long denouncing Wolsey, sneering at him as "Og, the fat hog of Bashan," lashing him and his clergy for their cupidity, their arrogance, self-indulgence, worldliness—for the way in which they bought and sold mitres, clothed their mules in gold, as he said, while their poor neighbours died for lack of meat. He imagines the prelates so infuriated by his devastating censures that they are crying out against him :

Take him, Warden of the Fleet !
 I say, Lieutenant of the Tower,
 Make this clown for to loure,
 Lodge him in Little Ease,
 Feed him on beans and peas ;
 The King's Bench and Marshalsea,
 Have him thither by-and-by.

And thither Wolsey certainly would have had him at last, only he fled in good time to sanctuary in the precincts of Westminster Abbey, and died while he was sheltering there.

The Middle Ages are supposed to have ended, officially, with the fall of Constantinople in

1453; but Henry VIII, who had such a bad habit of dissolving marriages with an axe – he and his daughter, Queen Mary, who was responsible for so many Smithfield burnings, were essentially mediæval monarchs, and the Middle Ages did not really end until that autocratic father and daughter had gone their ways.

Caxton set up the first English printing press at Westminster in 1476, and that was the beginning of the end of the old order. At the close of the fifteenth century, the new era was ready to dawn when, after Caxton's death, his assistant, Wynkyn de Worde, removed the business from Westminster and established his printer's shop in Fleet Street, opposite Shoe Lane, appropriately and significantly enough, at the sign of the Sun.

I

WITH all her faults, I suppose Queen Elizabeth was one of the ablest and greatest monarchs we ever had, and certainly under her rule there was a miraculous awakening in the arts, in commerce, in the whole civic and national life of her kingdom, and England prospered at home and abroad. She broke the power of Spain and made herself mistress of the seas ; her merchant adventurers, and such daring explorers and filibusters as Raleigh and Drake, by their enterprising traffic and conquests in unknown or little known places on the other side of the world, laid the foundations of that empire over the water which makes the greater Britain of to-day.

But all these larger things are matters of history – and, by the way, one of the best accounts of the doings of the Elizabethan merchant adventurers is in *The Romance of Commerce*, a book written some years ago by that famous modern merchant, Mr. Gordon Selfridge. My subject limits me to London and the life of

London, and I am limiting myself to picturing something of these as they are reflected in our imaginative literature, especially in the literature of the Elizabethan era. I have nothing much therefore to do even with some of the noted men who have been London's greatest servants. While Shakespeare was still a child at Stratford, Sir Thomas Gresham, for example, was building the first Royal Exchange, but Gresham does not figure prominently in the imaginative literature with which I am chiefly concerned.

The expansion of England and its growing importance of course added to the importance of London ; made it busier and more crowded ; but not much larger than it had been when Chaucer knew it. There were fewer monks to be seen about the Elizabethan streets ; some of the monasteries had been pulled down and some converted to secular uses ; the rise of the theatre, the coming of printed books and opening of many bookshops, were new aids to the gaiety and enlightenment of the citizens, though no theatres were, or ever have been, allowed within the City boundary, except for an interval when Shakespeare's fellow-actor, Burbage, established a theatre just within Ludgate, in the Black Friars' monastery, which was not under the Lord Mayor's jurisdiction – and you have

a reminder of that theatre in the name of Playhouse Yard, where *The Times* printing works stand.

In most essentials, however, Elizabethan London remained the London of the Middle Ages ; its walls and gates were intact ; business went on as usual in its market streets ; it was the same small, intimate city, with the taverns playing perhaps a more integral part in its social life than ever, and the Fleet River, dirtier and shallower by reason of the centuries of refuse that had been flung into it, still flowing past Ludgate to the Thames. But across the Fleet Bridge, Fleet Street was putting up shops and houses and losing its rural aspect ; the gardens along Holborn were being similarly built upon ; and Moorfields and the suburbs generally were breaking into shops and houses and spreading towards the outlying villages. Also the palaces and mansions of the Strand were giving way to places of business, and Westminster was being more and more linked up with London.

For the life and character of the town you cannot do better than go to the dramatists of the period – not so much to Shakespeare as to his lesser contemporaries, to Ben Jonson, Dekker, Middleton, Thomas Randolph, Beaumont and Fletcher, most of whom give you

glimpses or full pictures of it ; and the wilder, lower, more lawless side of it is most realistically revealed in the prose stories and pamphlets of Robert Greene and others, in Dekker's chronicle of *The Wonderful Year, 1603*, and in his other prose pamphlet, *The Seven Deadly Sins of London* - to which we will come presently. There is, indeed, such a bewildering quantity and variety of material to be had from these sources alone, to say nothing of what has been done by later and by some living writers who have imaginatively re-created the life of Elizabethan London for us, that I feel the better plan is to begin by taking Shakespeare as a centre and making acquaintance with certain phases of that life in his company.

2

In 1588, all England was feverishly on the alert for the threatened attack of the Spanish Armada. There were watchers all round the coasts, and ships at sea on the look-out for it, and at the first news of its approach there were beacons in readiness on a long chain of hills from the west coast to the east, and from Beachy Head right across London and up to the north, and the lighting of the first beacon was to be

the signal for the next, and that for the next to light, until within an hour or two every hill-top from the south of England to the north, and from the east to the west, would be sending up its warning flame. You remember the tension, the gathering of crowds in the streets, on that night in August 1914 when we were waiting to know whether or not there was to be war with Germany. It was something like that in London on a night in 1588 when the beacons had been fired and the signal was leaping from hill to hill, and you can't have a vivid picture of it all than you get in Macaulay's unfinished ballad of the Armada :

The sentinel on Whitehall gate looked forth into the
 night,
And saw o'erhanging Richmond Hill the streak of
 blood-red light,
Then bugle's note and cannon's roar the deathlike
 silence broke,
And with one start and with one cry the royal city
 woke.
At once on all her stately gates arose the answering
 fires ;
At once the wild alarum clashed from all her reeling
 spires ;
From all the batteries of the Tower pealed loud the
 voice of fear ;



Fred^d Adcock

Corner of Silver Street and Monkwell Street.
FROM ST OLAVE'S CHURCHYARD -

ON THIS SITE STOOD THE SHOP OF MOUNTJOY THE WIG-MAKER, WITH WHOM SHAKESPEARE LODGED FROM 1598 TO 1604, WHILE HE WAS WRITING TWELFTH NIGHT HAMLET, MEASURE FOR MEASURE, OTHELLO, AND OTHER OF HIS PLAYS.

E L I Z A B E T H A N L O N D O N

And all the thousand masts of Thames sent back a
louder cheer ;
And from the furthest wards was heard the rush of
hurrying feet,
And the broad streams of pikes and flags rushed down
each roaring street,
And broader still became the blaze, and louder still the
din,
And fast from every village round the horse came
spurring in ;
And eastward straight from wild Blackheath the
warlike errand went,
And roused in many an ancient hall the gallant squires
of Kent. . . .

That night, when all the city roused to the alarm of the coming of the Armada, Shakespeare had been living in London for rather more than a year. He had left his wife in Stratford to come to London with a troupe of traveling players, and, then a young man of about twenty-four, was engaged in some minor capacity at a playhouse named The Theatre, which stood in Shoreditch, near where the Standard Theatre is to-day. It had been built by James Burbage, a Shoreditch carpenter and joiner, who developed into the first of actor managers, and was the father of Richard Burbage, the most famous actor of the Shakespearean era.

We know that Shakespeare was working for the theatre in London that night when the Armada was signalled, but where he was living is unknown. Tradition says that at one time he made his home in the parish of St. Helen's, Bishopsgate; and that after he had become moderately famous he had lodgings over in Southwark, near the Globe Theatre, in which he acted and for which he wrote plays, and of which he was one of the proprietors. If he ever wrote letters home they have not been preserved. He had a friend, Richard Quiney, a vintner, who lived at the sign of the Bell in Carter Lane, Cannon Street, and there exists one letter written by him from Carter Lane to Shakespeare, asking for a loan of £30, but this was not written till 1598, when Shakespeare was lodging not far from Cheapside.

I can remember when a very old house and shop survived in Aldersgate Street with an inscription on it: "Here lived William Shakespeare," and, though I believe this was doubted, there was this much excuse for the tradition - that some fifteen years ago it was proved beyond question that Shakespeare did live at the corner of Monkwell Street a hundred yards or so to the rear of that Aldersgate shop. A tradition of his residence had probably been

handed down in the neighbourhood, and, growing hazy with the passing of time, had ended by missing the right house and settling on the wrong one close by it. We are deeply indebted to a distinguished American, Professor Wallace, for this discovery of one of Shakespeare's London addresses. Professor Wallace had spent a good deal of time dredging in the masses of uncodified papers preserved at the Record Office for anything of interest that was to be found, when one lucky day he lighted upon a number of legal documents which not only revealed the place of Shakespeare's residence between 1598 and 1604, when he was writing some of the greatest of his dramas, but threw curiously intimate side-lights on the life he was living there.

3

I have an idea that when he came from the door of that shop at the corner of Monkwell Street and Silver Street, more often than not, he took the way to the left along Silver Street and so down Wood Street to Cheapside, where, almost fronting the end of Wood Street, was the Mermaid Tavern. It stood between Bread Street and Friday Street, and could be entered

by passages opening from each of the streets ; and when the Great Fire swept it out of existence Cheapside lost its chief glory and London such a tavern as it had never seen before and will never see again.

Keats, who lived for a while in Cheapside, in rooms over Bird-in-Hand Court, must have hovered round the place where that sanctified old hostelry used to be before he wrote the lyric beginning :

Souls of poets dead and gone,
 What Elysium have ye known,
 Happy field or mossy cavern
 Choicer than the Mermaid Tavern ?

And the great Elizabethans themselves, one poet of them in particular, have left testimony enough of the delight they had in it when they met there to eat and drink and talk the hours away.

They seem to have formed themselves into a kind of informal club, which included Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Beaumont, Fletcher, Donne, Selden, Fuller, Sir Walter Raleigh, and other famous men among its members. It was there that old Fuller used to listen to those high arguments into which, he says, Ben Jonson

sailed with the weight and impressiveness of a Spanish galleon, while Shakespeare with his nimbler wit flashed from point to point and tacked and manœuvred as swiftly and lightly as an English frigate. As for the references to the Mermaid in the dramatic and other literature of the time, they are more than sufficient to give you a notion of its popularity and importance.

In the poem that tells the story of a celebrated but Rabelaisian voyage of his through London's obscurer waterways, Ben Jonson sings of "the brave adventure of two wights" who

At Bread Street's Mermaid having dined, and merry
Proposed to go to Holborn in a wherry.

If you proposed to go to Holborn in a wherry nowadays it would be taken for granted that you had been doing more than dining, but in a day when ships sailed up the Fleet River to the foot of Ludgate Hill, and the old bourn and other streams were navigable, it was as natural for them to go to Holborn in a wherry as it is for us to go there in a bus or a taxi. In Jonson's *The Devil is an Ass*, too, you have Meercraft rebuking the impoverished Everill with :

This comes of wearing
Scarlet, gold lace and cut-works, your fine gartering,
With your blown roses, cousin, and your eating
Pheasant and godwit, here in London, haunting
The Globes and Mermaids, wedging in with lords
Still at the table. . . .

A few years ago Alfred Noyes gathered together the history and legend of the place and re-created its vanished glories in his *Tales of the Mermaid Tavern*. Theodore Watts-Dunton did something in the same way a little earlier in his *Christmas at the Mermaid*, but his figures of Raleigh, Ben Jonson, Chapman, Drayton, and other of the great Elizabethans who gathered there are faint, shadowy, characterless, and he makes nothing but a shadow-show, a dim, gracious dream of it all. Noyes takes those poets, dramatists, actors, men of the Court and men of the City who congregated at the Mermaid and makes them human and alive, puts colour and movement and gusto into the whole thing, and if you know the biographies of the many people he introduces, you will realise how faithfully he has woven big and little facts about them into his tales. They serve my purpose just now because the tales are very typical tales of the period. Noyes begins by telling how he wandered

through London one night, seeing the mighty bubble of St. Paul's floating under a foggy sunset, and strayed dreaming into Cheapside to Bread Street, and this is how he restores the vanished tavern to its place there :

I found myself within a narrow street
Alone. There was no rumour, near or far,
Of the long tides of traffic. In my doubt
I turned and knocked upon an old inn-door
Hard by, an ancient inn of mullioned panes
And crazy beams and overhanging eaves ;
And as I knocked, the slowly changing west
Seemed to change all the world with it and leave
Only that old inn steadfast and unchanged,
A rock in the rich-coloured tides of time.

While he knocks, he hears wine-cups within clatter on the table and lusty voices singing of those merchant adventurers who were so often in those days sailing from Plymouth Sound, " all for adventure in the great New Regions " ; and as the song ends, a figure in crimson doublet and trunk hose, wearing a rapier, swaggers past him, and he recognises the Walter Raleigh who had gallantly laid his cloak in the mud for Queen Elizabeth to walk upon. As Raleigh pushes open the door and enters, he follows :

At his heels

I followed – into the Mermaid – through three yards
Of pitch-black gloom, then into an old inn parlour
Swimming with faces in a mist of smoke
That upcurled, blue, from the long Winchester pipes,
While – like some rare old picture in a dream
Recalled – quietly listening, laughing, watching,
Pale on that old black-oaken wainscot floated
One bearded oval face, young, with deep eyes,
Whom Raleigh hailed as “ Will.”

And so you come at once upon Shakespeare, the Mermaid's most immortal guest. Ben Jonson, Drayton, Marlowe, Chapman, and from time to time – for the years go by as the tales are told – many others are brought into the scene whose names belong to our literature of those times and of all time, and the tales that are told are such as belong to that age and were talked of in the London of that age. There are tales of Sir Humphrey Gilbert, drowned on his way home from his discovery of Newfoundland in 1583; of how Marlowe was killed in the brawl at Deptford; of how Will Kempe the actor did his nine days' dance from London to Norwich for a wager; of the burial of Mary Queen of Scots; and a dozen more that are true to fact or tradition and steeped in the atmosphere of the period. There is, for

instance, that story of how the dramatists Marston and Chapman were arrested and prisoned in Newgate for writing a play which had offended the Scottish susceptibilities of James I, and were condemned to have their noses slit and their ears cut off after the manner of the time. Ben Jonson heard of this at the Mermaid, and since he also had been part-author of that play, *Eastward Ho!* he loyally goes off to give himself up and share the doom of the others.

He gripped his cudgel, called for a quart of ale,
 Then, like Helvellyn with his rocky face
 And mountain belly, he surged along Cheapside,
 Snorting with wrath, and rolled into the gaol
 To share their punishment.

The other two were men of smaller importance ; Jonson was by then the greatest literary personage of the age ; writing masques for the Court, and in favour there. Selden and Camden, men of weight and dignity and friends of Jonson, promptly went to the King and under their influence he was moved to pardon the offenders. So that Jonson's courage in standing by his collaborators saved all three. But before his fate was decided, Ben's mother went to him in prison and smuggled a phial of

poison into his hand, and kept a second phial for herself, for she was a fine old Spartan who said she would sooner see him dead than so horribly disfigured. These things are true; they are incidents in any biography of Jonson; and Noyes touches them all in deftly and effectively – at least, they are all true except there is no record that the news of his friends having been arrested reached Ben Jonson at the Mermaid, but there is no evidence that it did not, so Noyes had poetical licence for assuming that it did. Then you have, in his *Tales of the Mermaid Tavern*, the right romantic story of Sir Richard Whittington told by the sexton of Bow Church who runs into the Mermaid to escape from the noisy mob of prentices who are after him, because he rang the bell of Bow Church ten minutes too late and kept those prentices of Chepe working after their due hour; and there is chapter and verse for this mobbing of the sexton, too, in Stow's *Survey*. After the prentices have been placated and dispersed, the sexton in Noyes's poem lingers to refresh himself, and is presently relating the then century-old history which had made Bow bells famous – the tale of how when Dick Whittington, the prentice, was running away to seek his fortunes, he rested on Highgate Hill

and there heard the bells calling him back to be thrice Lord Mayor of London. A foolish old legend, you may say, but if we really think that, why do we still, in this hard-headed age, preserve the stone on which Whittington was sitting when he heard the bells? And Noyes makes Sir Richard no fairy-tale or pantomime hero. He carries him through a romance that is by turns pleasantly homely, breezily adventurous, coloured with a charm of sentiment, and takes occasion to show you something of the splendour, the merriment, the mummers and morrice dancers that poured through the streets of London on the days when Londoners were making holiday. He does justice to Whittington not only as a dweller on the shores of old romance, but as a business man and practical benefactor who endowed London with hospitals, schools, colleges, and libraries.

If you want to see how close in his tales Noyes can keep to the record of facts, and how subtly he can heighten the effect of them by imaginatively developing the least hint at other things that is in the written record, you should read in the *Tales of the Mermaid* "The Companion of a Mile" (which opens and closes with all the singing and laughter and riot of early morning May Day revels in Cheapside) - read

his "Companion of a Mile," and then read Will Kempe's own narrative of his nine days' dance from London to Norwich, *Nine Daies Wonder*, which was republished only a year or two ago, and you will find Noyes has merely clothed in poetry the record of a fantastic but real event.

Another of his tales is of the death of Robert Greene, the dramatist, and that also is true and is typical of the London of the time. But we will go to Greene himself for it.

4

Robert Greene, Robert Peele, Thomas Nash, and Christopher Marlowe came to London from Cambridge or Oxford, led a wild, riotous, dissipated life about town, and were between them the founders of the English drama and of the English novel. They all died in poverty, and all died young - Nash at thirty-four, Peele at thirty-eight, Marlowe (who was living at Deptford to evade a plague which was raging in London, when he was killed in a drunken quarrel) at thirty-nine, and Greene at thirty-two. Marlowe was the one great poet and dramatist of the four, but the others had brilliant gifts, and Greene died the most squalid, miserable, and

pitiful death of them all. They were all four denounced by their more decorous contemporaries as atheists, blasphemers, and desperately wicked; but I suspect the indictment was exaggerated, and that Greene even exaggerated it himself when in his last days he wrote his *Groat's Worth of Witte, bought with a million of Repentance*, and gave himself and his companions a blacker character than anyone else had given them. At the end of the *Groat's Worth of Witte*, a story in which he plays a part thinly disguised as Roberto, he has an address "To those Gentlemen his Quondam acquaintance that spend their wits in making plays, R. G. wisheth a better exercise and wisdom to prevent his extremities." He speaks of his woeful experience and unheard-of wretchedness, and adjures his friends: "Wonder not (for with thee will I first begin) thou famous gracer of Tragedians [which evidently means Marlowe, who was killed a year later] that Greene who hath said with thee (like the fool in his heart) There is no God, should now give glory unto his greatness; for penetrating is his power, his hand lies heavy upon me, he hath spoken unto me with a voice of thunder, and I have felt he is a God that can punish enemies." He calls upon each of his boon companions in turn to repent, and, saying

that their theatrical friends and rivals who owe them so much have now forsaken them all, breaks into that notorious, scornful attack on Shakespeare, who had certainly imitated Marlowe and filched some of his plots from the romances of Greene and the others: "Yes trust them not; for there is an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his Tiger's heart wrapt in a player's hide supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you; and being an absolute Johannes factotum, is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a country. O that I might entreat your rare wits to be employed in more profitable courses, and let those Apes imitate your past excellence, and never more acquaint them with your admired inventions." So mingling pride in his and his friends' literary achievements with his penitence, he concludes, "But now return I again to you three, knowing my misery is to you no news; and let me heartily entreat you to be warned by my harms. Delight not (as I have done) in irreligious oaths. Despise drunkenness, which wasteth the wit, and maketh men all equal unto beasts. Fly lust as the deathsmen of the soul, and defile not the Temple of the Holy Ghost. . . . The fire of my light is now at last snuff, and for want of wherewith to

sustain it there is no substance left for life to feed on."

On a night of August 1592 a poor shoemaker named Isam found Robert Greene lying desperately ill in Thames Street or one of the narrow lanes thereabouts, and out of pity, though he was a complete stranger, carried him home to his shop at the foot of the hill, "neere Dowgate." Greene had come from a riotous feast with Thomas Nash, and was drunk as well as ill; and his illness developing into a kind of dropsy, he lay for a month, slowly dying, in that house by the gate, carefully tended by the charitable shoemaker and his wife. His sword and some of his clothes were sold for three shillings; otherwise his host found the money for all his needs.

While he lay there, in those last four weeks of his life, he wrote his *Groat's Worth of Witte* and also a paper of wise counsels to a friend, and a prayer "in his sickness"; and throughout all those last days, a contemporary recorded " (then lying sore sick of surfeit which he had taken with drinking) he continued most patient and penitent; yea, he did with tears forsake the world, renounced swearing, and desired forgiveness of God and the world for all his offences: so that during all the time of his sickness (which was about a month's space) he was never heard

to swear, rave or blaspheme the name of God as he was accustomed to do before that time, which greatly comforted his wellwillers, to see how mightily the grace of God did work in him."

He had deserted his wife six years since, and it is some indication of her character that his thoughts turned to her with confidence when he was nearing the end; having given his host a bond for ten pounds, he wrote a brief note of appeal to her, saying, "Doll, I charge thee, by the love of our youth and my soul's rest, that thou wilt see this man paid; for if he and his wife had not succoured me I had died in the streets."

The contemporary chronicler of his month of illness remarks that "his sickness did not so greatly weaken him, but that he walked to his chair and back again the night before he departed, and then (being feeble) laying him down on his bed, about nine of the clock at night, a friend of his told him that his wife had sent him commendations, and that she was in good health; whereat he greatly rejoiced, confessed he had mightily wronged her, and wished that he might see her before he departed. Whereupon (feeling his time was short), he took pen and ink and wrote her a letter to this effect: 'Sweet wife, as ever there was any good will or

friendship between thee and me, see this bearer (my Host) satisfied of his debt. I owe him ten pounds, and but for him I had perished in the streets. Forget and forgive my wrongs done unto thee, and Almighty God have mercy on my soul. Farewell till we meet in heaven, for on earth thou shalt never see me more. This 2nd of September, 1592. Written by thy dying Husband, Robert Greene.' ”

It takes you back strangely near to it all if you linger at the foot of Dowgate Hill, where the old gate used to be, some evening about nine of the clock, and think how at the same hour on an evening long ago that friend called with his message at a house so close at hand, but so completely vanished, and in a dim, candle-lighted room there the unhappy Robert Greene roused himself to write that last piteous letter. With all his faults – and his penitential outcries do not altogether reconcile you to them – Greene must have had some great charm of personality, or that poor shoemaker and his wife would not have devoted themselves to the care of him with such continuing kindness and grown to feel such regard and admiration for him that, touched, maybe, by some instinctive desire to lessen the neglect and dishonour into which this poet had fallen, the weeping woman made a wreath of

laurel and crowned him with it as he lay dead in his coffin, waiting to be carried away for burial in Bedlam churchyard. The foot of Dowgate Hill is made holy ground and the squalor of its tragic story beautiful by a remembrance of the wonderful compassion of those two Samaritans and that final act of simple homage.

Greene lives in our literature, though every trace of him is gone from that Dowgate which, all rebuilt, survives in its old place. Down one side of it stretches the high, blind wall of the Cannon Street railway station ; down the other are gaunt warehouses, offices, and the comparatively modern halls of three ancient City Companies. At the foot of the hill is a Thames dock shut in by a flat, unlovely iron gate, where there used to be, in the days of the Romans and until the time of Elizabeth, a nobler water-gate, and the landing-stage of a ferry. Legend has it that in the tenth century the ferryman was a certain John Overy, whose effigy still survives, I believe, in the Church of St. Saviour by London Bridge.

Sir Francis Drake lived on Dowgate Hill, in a house that had, a century earlier, been occupied by the Earl of Warwick, "the Kingmaker." Ben Jonson knew Drake, and knew the street, for in one of his epigrams he describes a homely

sight that must have been familiar to both of them. In stormy weather, the rainwater from a drainless Cannon Street used to pour tumultuously down the hill, and Jonson deftly pictures "Dowgate's torrent falling into Thames," and a group of boys at play with a

brown-paper fleet
Yarely set out there to sail down the street.

That torrent no longer flows down the hill even on the rainiest day and no boys ever play there ; it is too stolid a place of business now to foster any such youthful and unbusinesslike vagaries.

Ben Jonson was under twenty, and had not written that epigram or any of his plays and was still unknown, when that event happened which has made Dowgate a name in literary history and one of the most tragic and memorable of London's streets. Merchants have carried on business and grown rich in it through the three hundred years that have passed since Greene wrote his last letter, but, in spite of all their triumphs, the street would be as commonplace and undistinguished as it looks if that poor shoemaker had not been charitable and taken in the tragically broken outcast who died there.

5

One thing Robert Greene gained from his loose, disreputable life about town was an extraordinarily intimate knowledge of the underworld and the tricksters, thieves, card-sharpers, rogues, and vagabonds who preyed upon simple citizens and visitors from the country. He put that knowledge into some half-dozen little books on coney catching – that is, on catching and fleecing the simpleton or the unsuspectingly honest. If you read his realistic sketches of what went on in London in this way you will not be surprised that a tradition grew up, and still prevails in rural parts, that London is a dreadfully dangerous as well as a sinful city and that an honest man with a little money on him cannot walk its streets with any security. Some of these swindlers and cut-purses worked singly, some in pairs or in small gangs, and their methods varied amazingly. They haunted the taverns and cook-shops, the aisle of St. Paul's Cathedral, the market streets, Smithfield, the Exchange – everywhere where crowds congregated or stray visitors were likely to wander.

They assumed all sorts of disguises, and would walk abroad as workmen, tradesmen, carters, countrymen, fine gentlemen, gentlemen's

servants, travellers from overseas, and often had women confederates ready to help them trap the unwary. Greene causes a certain, or uncertain, Ned Browne to relate his autobiography and disclose, among other things, how he snared and blackmailed a wealthy Whitechapel maltster in Petticoat Lane ; how, dressed as a gentleman, he met an elegant lady in Smithfield, coming from St. Bartholomew's Church with four attendants, walked boldly up pretending to be acquainted with her, stooped and kissed her, after the custom of the time, and covertly possessed himself of her purse, and while she was blushing confusedly, he, gallantly apologising for having mistaken her identity, passed on and escaped with his booty. He glories in the ruse by which he and three confederates robbed a gentleman of a full purse in St. Paul's ; and another rascal tells how two of them conspired to cheat a countryman who was seeing the sights. One pretended to have picked up a handkerchief he thought the countryman had dropped, and his apparent honesty made a favourable impression and the two fell into conversation as they walked together. The countryman was easily led into saying what town he hailed from, into talking of his occupation at home, of his friends there, and into

mentioning the name of a neighbour. Then the affable Londoner had to part from him ; went off and passed all the information he had gathered to his confederate, and presently the confederate, falling in with the victim, gets him to mention the town he comes from and promptly exclaims that a neighbour of the countryman's is a great friend of his, and when he mentions the name the visitor is overjoyed to find in this strange, lonely, perilous city one who is in a sense acquainted with his native place, and has so evidently heard of him from that neighbour that he can talk familiarly of his business. The rest is easy. The countryman, invited into a tavern, goes without qualms, the Londoner introduces him to one or two people he happens to know there. They sit at a table, and three Londoners start a game of cards, thinking it may amuse the guest to look on and see how cleverly they play. It looks a simple game, one so easy to win, that, seeing a sure opportunity of making money, the countryman wants to take a hand. He does so, is allowed to win a trifle to encourage him, but is soon stripped to his last penny. The devices of these coney catchers are too many to be detailed, and, even including a primitive form of the confidence trick, they are mostly such as are in

practice in disreputable circles down to our own day.

Nash furnishes a few snapshots of London in his novel *The Unfortunate Traveller*; but a far better social historian is Thomas Dekker in his prose pamphlets *The Seven Deadly Sins of London* and *The Wonderful Year*. The Wonderful Year was 1603, when Queen Elizabeth died and James I was proclaimed, and those events were accompanied by another of the terrible plagues by which London was so often devastated. The Queen died at Richmond, and Dekker tells you in some preliminary verse that she was brought to Whitehall, where she lay in state, and the nation wept for her. Then, for the coronation, there was mirth, he says, in every man's face, the streets were plumed with gallants, smokers filled whole taverns, the vintners hung out new ivy bushes and bright flags from their weather-beaten lattices. But suddenly, all in a moment, this general mirth was changed again into lamentation, for the plague had leaped upon the city like a devouring lion. And remembering the smallness of London and that over 40,000 died in it of that plague, you can believe Dekker was not without warrant when he wrote, "Surely the loud groans of raving sick men; the struggling pangs of souls

departing ; in every house grief striking up in alarm ; servants crying out for masters ; wives for husbands, parents for children, children for their mothers ; here he should have met some frantically running to knock up sextons ; there others fearfully sweating with coffins, to steal forth dead bodies, lest the fatal hand-writing of death should seal up their doors (i.e. they should be doomed to remain within the house since it was known to be plague stricken). And to make this dismal consort more full, round about him bells heavily tolling in one place, and ringing out in another ; the dreadfulness of such an hour is unutterable." The well-to-do fled from the town, till there was not " a good horse in Smithfield nor a coach to set eye on." Every street, he says, looked like Bucklersbury, the street of the apothecaries, for dragon-water and other remedies for the disease were on sale everywhere, and " Lazarus lay groaning at every man's door, but no Dives was within to send him a crumb (for all your gold-finches were fled to the woods), and there was no dog left to lick his sores " - the dogs had been ruthlessly killed for fear they should run about and carry the plague. There were poor wretches thrust out of doors by their masters and dying under the stalls ; Dekker jots down notes of

how terror made men brutal to each other ; how the sextons were piling up money and wished the plague would last (just as some for similar reasons used to wish the war would last) ; of how the warehouses at Stepney were full of dead, and enormous pits were dug here and there and hundreds at a time flung in to be buried - " I am amazed to remember what dead marches were made of three thousand trooping together ; husbands, wives and children, being led as ordinarily to one grave, as if they had gone to one bed."

That year of the plague was the year in which Shakespeare wrote *Troilus and Cressida*, while he was living over the wigmaker's shop at the corner of Monkwell Street and Silver Street, so he must have seen something of those horrors that Dekker went through.

In his *Seven Deadly Sins of London*, which appeared three years later, Dekker gives London a character as bad or worse than Greene gave it in his chronicles of its villainies. His sins are allegorical abstractions but his other characters are real. He begins with the arrival of Fraudulent Bankruptcy, who rides magnificently in at Ludgate to receive the Freedom of the City. He shows you how the fraudulent bankrupt dupes other traders and the public and grows

rich and flourishes while his victims are reduced to beggary. "Ten dicing houses," he says, "cheat not young gentlemen of so much money in a year as these do in a month. The thief that dies at Tyburn for a robbery, is not half so dangerous a weed in a Commonwealth as the fraudulent bankrupt. I would there were a Derrick to hang him up too." This Derrick was the hangman of the period, and about that time the crane as we know it was invented, and probably because it has some resemblance to a gallows it was called a derrick after the hangman.

The second sin, Lying, came in by Moorgate early in the morning - sneaking in unnoted among a string of colliers' carts; and soon after his arrival, when it was known who he was, "there was of every trade in the city and of every profession some that instantly were dealers with him." The third sin, Candle-Light, comes in by Aldersgate, because though spacious that was a badly lighted street. Candle-Light counts as a sin because so many evils come out by it. The young shopkeepers, the prentices, quit their homes and sit by candle-light drinking and dicing in the taverns - and Dekker's general outline of what happens in the city by that glimmering light satisfies you that, though their opportunities for vice were more limited, our

ancestors made the most of them and were certainly no better than we are. Sloth, the fourth sin, comes in by Bishopsgate; and the fifth, Apeishness, or affectation of manner and vanity of dress, prances in by Cripplegate. The sixth, which was Shaving—a slang term for swindling—marches proudly in at Newgate; and the seventh and last was Cruelty, which comes in at Aldgate, the name being punned as All-gate to intimate that no gate is closed against him. For this seventh sin Dekker reserves his bitterest invective. No city is so good, he says, to the widow and the orphan, the leper and the lunatic; there are large hospitals for the sick; yet for all this charity London is the cruellest of cities too. There are thirteen prisons, “thirteen strong houses of sorrow where the prisoner hath his heart wasting away sometimes a whole prenticeship of years in cares.” Their cells are cold, unwholesome, small, but “O what a deal of wretchedness can make shift to lie in a little room.” He speaks of the whipping-posts in the streets, the stocks, and other forms of harsh punishment, and “so many hempen tragedies acted at Tyburn,” where far more were hanged for stealing than for murder; of the cruelties of creditors who lock men up for debts and so make it impossible for them to earn

money and pay them ; of the cruelty of masters who drive their apprentices hard through their years of service and give them no chance to set up in rivalry to themselves when they are out of their indentures ; and of other cruelties, raging most against the vicious imprisonment for debt, and what it meant to the wives and families of the prisoners. When he says there are thirteen prisons in London I think he understates it - he was perhaps counting only the large prisons. There were numerous compters, as they were called, in Wood Street, Cursitor Street, Coleman Street, and other places, where prisoners for debt were kept for long or short times before their cases were disposed of and they could be transferred to the Marshalsea, the Fleet, or elsewhere.

It appalled me when I first looked over old maps and noticed that from long ago until the days of Dickens there were almost as many prisons in London as churches, as many or more prisons than schools. And I think it significant that this barbaric state of things was not greatly altered until education became more general, the franchise was widened, and the common people began to take a hand in their own government.

It was in a very different, a much lighter mood that Dekker wrote *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, a realistic comedy that is rich in London atmosphere and character. Early in the fifteenth century, Sir Simon Eyre, a Lord Mayor of London, built, mainly of lead, at the corner of Leadenhall and Gracechurch Streets, a large hall that was to be used as "a public granary for laying up corn against a time of scarcity." Dekker, more than a century later, introduces Simon Eyre into his comedy, makes him an eccentric shoemaker carrying on business in Tower Street, and, in the play, he becomes Lord Mayor, builds the hall and entertains the King there, and a great company, including his own workmen. The comedy, with its shop in Tower Street, and its lively group of shoemakers, takes you all about the city, and has scenes in, or references to, Doctors' Commons, Fleet Street, Finsbury, Eastcheap (Eyre sends a boy to Falstaff's tavern there, the Boar's Head, for a dozen cans of beer for his workmen); then there are references to Guildhall, St. Paul's, Panyer Alley in Paternoster Row, the Inn of the Golden Ball in Watling Street, and there are two or three pictures of Cornhill. Cornhill, at that

date was made up of picturesque gabled buildings, and goldsmiths and wealthy merchants lived over their shops and warehouses there; and when the city train band went out on its periodical route marching it strutted with banners and trumpets and military bravery along the broad avenues of Cheapside and Cornhill, watched by bright eyes from windows and doors. You have, in Ben Jonson's *The Devil is an Ass*, Meercraft advising Gilthead to buy a captain's place for his son in the train band,

And let him
 Into the world early, and with his plume
 And scarfs march through Cheapside, or along Cornhill,
 And by virtue of those, draw down a wife
 There from a window worth ten thousand pounds.

And Cornhill has a flashing memory of Sybil, the lively maid to Rose, daughter of Sir Roger Oatley, whose shop is on Cornhill, in Dekker's *Shoemaker's Holiday*. Sybil goes to join her mistress, when she is staying with friends at Old Ford, and Rose inquires if she has seen in London anything of young Lacy, the cold, dignified gallant with whom Rose is in love, but who seems indifferent to her.

“ Oh, yes, by my troth,” Sybil answers, “ I

scarce knew him. Here he wore a scarf, and here a scarf, and here a bunch of feathers, and here precious stones, and jewels and a pair of garters – O monstrous! like one of our yellow silk curtains at home in Old Ford house here. I stood at our door in Cornhill, looked at him, he at me, indeed, spake to him, but he not to me, not a word. Marry go up, thought I! He passed me by as proud – Marry, foh! you are grown humorous, thought I; and so shut the door, and in I came.”

You can see the eager face of the peering maid hastily withdrawn as the lordling swaggers by with his troop, and the closing of that slammed door breaks the dream and reminds you that there is no shop of Sir Roger Oatley on Cornhill any longer.

But I suppose no contemporary dramatist has preserved more of Elizabethan London for us than Ben Jonson. The scenes of his *Every Man in his Humour*, *The Magnetic Lady*, *The Alchemist*, *The New Inn*, *The Staple of News*, *The Silent Woman*, *A Tale of a Tub*, and *Bartholomew Fair*, are all laid in London, and are inhabited by people he rubbed shoulders with in the city round about him.

I like to think of Ben Jonson, who in his early days performed in a booth at Bartholomew

Fair, lingering about Smithfield among the sights and sounds of it after he had become famous, and one day sitting down to write his comedy of *Bartholomew Fair*, in which for the first time some of the crowd that struggled and jostled each other there, once a year, were made as real for us as any of the noted men and women who belong to the real history of that neighbourhood. He takes John Littlewit, a lawyer, his wife, his mother-in-law, and a snuffling Puritan preacher who might have been an ancestor of Mr. Chadband ; takes them roaming about Smithfield and Bartholomew Close, playing their parts in a story that develops amid all the hubbub and jollity of the Fair. Apart from two or three of the gentry and their servants, intimately concerned in the story, the characters are the puppet showmen, a dupe who keeps one of the clothier stalls in Bartholomew Close, toy-sellers, a wrestler, a pickpocket, a beadle, watchmen, cooks, eating-house keepers, a hostler connected with the horse-fair, a ballad-singer, a costermonger, and members of the general rabble. They and their doings are all minutely and realistically alive again in Ben Jonson's crowded scenes. But all these and thousands of other similar voices have passed into silence, and in 1855,



F.A.

THE PANYER STONE—PANYER ALLEY,
PATERNOSTER ROW
NOW FRAMED AND GLAZED

after seven hundred years of lusty annual existence, Bartholomew Fair was abolished.

Very much what Dickens was to Victorian London, Ben Jonson was to the London of Elizabeth and James I. Wherever you go between Westminster (where he was born) and Mile End, between Southwark and Kentish Town, there are streets, by-ways, sites of houses associated with him or with his scenes and characters.

Ben lived as a child in Hartshorn Lane, Charing Cross ; lording it over his Apollo Club, after he was famous, at the Devil's Tavern, close to Temple Bar ; was one of the company that met at the Mermaid, and went occasionally, where he sent some of his characters, to the Mitre Tavern, on the other side of Cheapside, in Wood Street ; so that if you walk up that crooked, narrow Mitre Court in Wood Street you have a feeling that you are walking back into Elizabethan London, and that though the tavern has vanished from the alley its atmosphere is still there.

One sign of how Jonson impressed his personality on London is that within my recollection three taverns named after him were surviving : one in Houndsditch, one in Goodman's Fields, and one in Shoe Lane that is there no

longer. I first read Jonson when I was a youngster, and ever since then Old Jewry has not interested me so much because from the eleventh to the thirteenth century it was the chief centre of the Jews in London and the scene of the anti-Jewish massacres ; nor because in one of the row of old houses in Frederick's Place, Old Jewry, Disraeli served as articled clerk to a solicitor ; but because the street and its surroundings belong to Ben Jonson's *Every Man in his Humour*.

Except for one or two houses in Frederick's Place and the back of a church, there is nothing in Old Jewry now of much antiquity. But at the Cheapside end, on the right, is Dove Court, and I am convinced that such a court was there when Jonson was writing. It retains what I guess was the shape of the earlier court which the Great Fire demolished, and in rebuilding it the builders have been unable to get rid of its quaint snugness, so that when you come into Dove Court to-day, just as when you enter that odd Mitre Court, you feel you have strayed right back into the Elizabethan era.

Next to Dove Court is now a modern tavern, and I am satisfied it is the lineal descendant of that Windmill Tavern which figures so largely in *Every Man in his Humour*. You

discover it in the first scene of Act 3 : " Scene—The Old Jewry. A room in the Windmill Tavern." And into the tavern walk Master Matthew, the town gull, Wellbred, half-brother to Squire Downright, and the inimitable Captain Bobadil, in breezy conversation. Wellbred is lodging at the house of the merchant Kitely, which is also in Old Jewry. Several scenes are laid in Kitely's house ; in one of them Kitely is in his office busy with his clerk when the bell rings for breakfast, which intimates that our citizens began their day's work some hours earlier than we do in this century, and conveys to you how business and domestic life went on side by side. Other scenes are in the house of Justice Clement, in Coleman Street, a continuation of Old Jewry, intersected by Gresham Street ; there are scenes in Moorfields, immediately outside the city wall ; and up a lane on Moorfields was the humble house of Cob, the water-carrier, in one of whose rooms the swaggering Captain Bobadil had a lodging, " very neat and private," which he concealed from his genteel associates. Out of this lane comes Cob every morning into the city by Moorgate and round to Coleman Street, past Justice Clement's house, bringing the day's water-supply to Master Kitely's house in Old Jewry,

and in that scene I have just mentioned, he arrives when the breakfast bell is ringing and is admonished by Kately for "coming so late this morning." It all brings the life of those times vividly before you; the merchant's business begun soon after daybreak, his domestic life going on simultaneously under the same roof; the water-carrier arriving, or, if he fails to come, the servants sent to fetch a supply from the conduit at the corner of Bucklersbury in Cheapside - it seems all so real still when you have read of it as Jonson writes of it, that when I had been roaming the streets all night on a journalistic mission, and came by chance into Old Jewry about sunrise, I had to linger opposite Frederick's Place, where I am sure, in my own mind, Master Kately's house used to stand, until I heard old Cob's slow feet slurring over phantasmal cobbles and the sharp-edged-clink of his water-pails fretting the morning air.

7

I ought to say something of Bankside, just across Southwark Bridge now, though there was no bridge to it then; for on Bankside was Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, and on other

parts of it there were bear-baitings and rough sports popular with the citizens, but I must refrain. One way and another, I think that in the years of Elizabeth and of James I, Cheapside was the soul and centre of literary London. I am not forgetting that Ben Jonson, in his later years, migrated to the Devil Tavern, in Fleet Street, and founded his famous Apollo Club there; but the Devil Tavern also is vanished; Child's Bank was built on its site, and the bank preserves the board on which the rules of Ben Jonson's Club are inscribed. The Apollo has a later history, but anyhow it does not rival the glory of the Mermaid. That glory belongs to Cheapside; moreover, the Mitre Tavern, in Wood Street, was another famous gathering-place of the wits, and the glamorous Mitre Court is still there to remind you of it. Donne was born in Wood Street; Milton was born in Bread Street, and was a child when Shakespeare passed his door on the way from the Mermaid to Puddle Dock, or one of the other docks in Thames Street, to be ferried over to Bankside, when he was acting at the Globe.

Then in Cheapside itself Herrick was born, and served for ten years as an apprentice to his uncle, who was a goldsmith. He was

middle-aged when Jonson died, and must have known the Mermaid well in his youth ; and though at thirty-eight he went away to be a parson in an obscure Devonshire parish, and write the most charming lyrics about fairies, and flowers, and rural things, and though he wrote slightly once of London as a place in which it was impossible to be innocent, he was a witty, sociable fellow, and came back to town at times, and once on returning wrote a poem in which he said that from the dull confines of the drooping West he came ravisht in spirit :

To thee, blest place of my nativity.
 Thus, thus, with hallowed foot I touch the ground. . . .
 Oh, Place, Oh, People, Manners, framed to please
 All nations, customs, kindreds, languages !
 I am a free-born Roman ; suffer then
 That I amongst you live a citizen.
 London my home is.

Which satisfies you that, after all, Herrick was a true cockney at heart. Well, in addition to that and its multitude of other memories, Cheapside, as I have said, had Keats living in it at a later period ; and Thomas Hood was born there in the Poultry. But instead of being proud of these things, and inviting everybody to share

its happiness in possessing them, except for putting up a tablet where Milton was born, Cheapside ignores them all. It might have clothed itself with romance by erecting a statue to Shakespeare, who lived close by out of Wood Street, with panels round about the pedestal commemorating the Mermaid and the Mitre and the great men associated with them; with medallions to Donne, Milton, Herrick, Keats, and Hood; but it has preferred to exhibit nothing from end to end of it but a commonplace statue to Sir Robert Peel.

That is London's way; it is incalculably rich in such varied and dazzling interests, but instead of giving its riches away openly and generously, it hides them as misers do, and goes grubbing along making more – mostly making more of a sort that is not worth so much.

I

It is as impossible, of course, to draw a hard and fast line between one age and another, as it would be to name the precise day, and hour of the day, when the spring ends and it is summer. No new fashion is adopted at once by everybody; something of last century's manners and habits of thought linger on into this century and will only pass away gradually as the older generation passes and the new generation occupies all its inheritance.

Both James Shirley, the dramatist, and Milton were Elizabethan survivals; so, too, were Herrick and Andrew Marvell — these brought a love of nature and a greater spirit of poetry from the earlier age down into an age that was growing more sophisticated, more artificial, less countrified, more citified. Shirley was born a few years before Elizabeth died, and reached the zenith of his fame in the days of Charles I. He was a Royalist during the Parliamentary War, and when Cromwell

triumphed he escaped into France. But before long he came quietly back to England, and, being unmolested, set up as a schoolmaster in Whitefriars, about the same time as Milton was keeping a private boarding-school near by over the shop of a tailor named Russel in St. Bride's Churchyard, which is now St. Bride's Avenue, just out of Fleet Street. In those years, the Puritans had closed all the theatres, so Shirley's plays were no longer acted, and when they were put on the stage again after the restoration of Charles II, they were found old-fashioned and had no success. He drudged at his schoolmastering, or picked up a living by helping smaller men in translations of Homer and Virgil, and when he was turned seventy he and his wife were driven out of their house by the Great Fire of London, and perished of terror and exposure in the neighbouring parish of St. Giles.

Under the Stuarts the city within its walls became more entirely a place of business. London outside the walls was spreading in all directions; rank and fashion were more and more making their homes in the western suburbs, and the citizens came out of their gates to find their pleasures in such rural spots as St. James's Park and Hyde Park, which had been royal

hunting-grounds when Henry VIII was King, and private gardens for Queen Elizabeth, but were now thrown open to the public. Shirley, who wrote his play, *Hyde Park*, under Charles I, gives you a good idea of how folk of the Court and the city flocked to Hyde Park, not from any love of the country, but for the sports and pastimes that were to be enjoyed there. I don't suppose nightingales are heard in any of our London parks now, but in Shirley's *Hyde Park* you have Mistress Carol reminded of an old superstition that it is lucky to hear the nightingale and exclaiming as she walks in the park with Fairfield :

Hark, sir, the nightingale ! there is better luck
Coming towards us.

But the chief business of lords and ladies and common people in the park would seem to have been to conduct their love intrigues more freely, and to witness the horse-racing for which the park was famous. At one point the stage directions in Shirley's *Hyde Park* are, " Confused noise of betting heard within," and the only song in the play is a rattling song about the race-horses and the jockeys. Fashionable London rode or drove its carriages in the ring there, as now it rides or drives in Rotten

Row ; and you learn from Pepys how all sorts of rich and poor went there gaily, and gaily dressed to celebrate May Day, which is only celebrated there nowadays by Labour demonstrations.

Another of Shirley's plays, also written after the accession of Charles I, is full of indications of how the world of fashion has taken to living more than ever outside the city walls. All the scenes of his *Lady of Pleasure* are laid in the Strand, chiefly in the houses of Sir Thomas Bornwell, or of Celestina, a young widow, who, when her steward tries to check her extravagances, declares :

My entertainments shall
 Be oftener and more rich. Who shall control me ?
 I live in the Strand, whither few ladies come
 To live, and purchase more than fame. I will
 Be hospitable, then, and spare no cost
 That may engage all generous report
 To trumpet forth my bounty and my bravery,
 Till the Court envy, and remove. . . .
 The horses shall be taught with frequent waiting
 Upon my gates to stop in their career
 Towards Charing Cross, spite of the coachman's fury ;
 And not a tilter but shall strike his plume
 When he sails by my window ; my balcony
 Shall be the courtier's idol, and more gazed at
 Than all the pageantry at Temple Bar
 By country clients.

The carriages and the tilers going by her house toward Charing Cross would be on their way to the Court at Whitehall. Master Heriot rode that way on his mule in Scott's *Fortunes of Nigel*, past the stately mansions of the Strand, past Charing Cross, "which," says Scott, "was no longer the pleasant solitary village at which the judges were wont to breakfast on their way to Westminster Hall," and down Whitehall went Master Heriot to the palace. Scott reminds you, too, that there was no arched gateway then at Temple Bar; it was merely "an open railing, or palisade, which at night, and in times of alarm, was closed with a barricade of posts and chains."

Although Scott's *Fortunes of Nigel* deals with a period shortly before Charles I came to the throne, his description of the shop of David Ramsay, the watchmaker, just within Temple Bar, a few yards east of St. Dunstan's Church, remains true as a description of a typical shop in the days, a few years later, with which we are concerned.

The shop of a London tradesman at that time [he says] was something very different from those we now see in the same locality. The goods were exposed to sale in cases, only defended from the weather by a

covering of canvas, and the whole resembled the stalls and booths now erected for the temporary accommodation of dealers at a country fair. But most of the shopkeepers of note, and David Ramsay among them, had their booth connected with a small apartment which opened backward from it, and bore the same resemblance to the front shop that Robinson Crusoe's cavern did to the tent which he erected before it.

When Ramsay was engaged in that inner room, "he left the outer posts of his commercial establishment to be maintained by two stout-bodied and strong-voiced apprentices, who kept up the cry of 'What d'ye lack? What d'ye lack?' accompanied with appropriate recommendations of the articles in which they dealt." The direct and personal application to passers-by for custom served instead of all our present newspaper puffs and advertisements. The verbal proclaimers of the excellence of their commodities had this advantage over those who, in the present day, use the newspapers, that they could in many cases adapt their address to the peculiar appearance and apparent taste of the passengers. That is, if the citizen were passing a hatter's or clothier's he could be told by the shouting prentices that his hat or coat was looking shabby, and it was possible to

shame him into buying a new one. But these personalities were sometimes dangerous. "Confiding in their numbers and civic union," Scott goes on, "the prentices of London were often seduced into taking liberties with the passers-by and exercising their wit at the expense of those whom they had no hope of converting into customers. If this were resented by any act of violence, the inmates of each shop were ready to pour forth in succour, and in the words of an old song which Dr. Johnson was used to hum,

Up then rose the prentices all,
Living in London, both proper and tall.

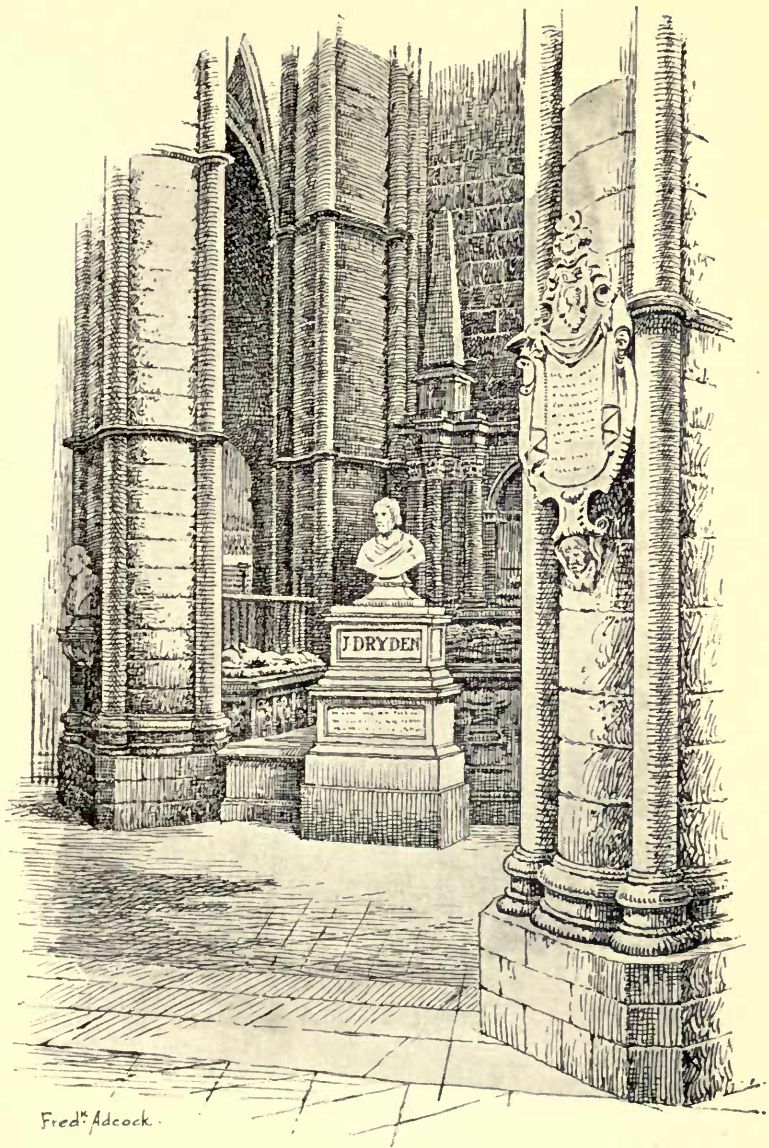
Desperate riots often arose on such occasions, especially when the Templars, or other youths connected with the aristocracy, were insulted, or conceived themselves to be so. Upon such occasions, bare steel was frequently opposed to the clubs of the citizens, and death sometimes ensued on both sides. The tardy and inefficient police of the time had no other resource than by the Alderman of the ward calling out the householders and putting a stop to the strife by overpowering numbers." This style of carrying on business and the riotous habits of the

prentices had not changed since the Middle Ages, but there had been great changes in other ways.

2

Whitefriars Street slopes out of Fleet Street down to the river through the centre of a district that used to be occupied by a Carmelite monastery and its garden. By the time of James I the monastery had disappeared, but the area that belonged to it retained the ancient right of sanctuary that was granted to religious houses and their precincts, and the streets that had replaced the monastery and its garden were a secure retreat for debtors, cutpurses, highwaymen, and all the blackguards of the town, for the law had no right to pursue them once they had escaped into that privileged quarter. I have a theory that however much you rebuild it, you can never eradicate from any part of London the influence of its past associations. If you go along Farringdon Street, where the Fleet prison used to stand, you will find a brooding dullness ; a curious gloom hangs over the furtive blind alleys, and the houses that cover its site. There is still, to my thinking, an air of cheerfulness about that corner by St. Andrew Undershaft in Leadenhall Street where the

maypole used to rise. And throughout Whitefriars the shady, disreputable character which the place bore so long still asserts itself. There is a hang-dog, sullen, dingy, dissipated air about Whitefriars Street which is curiously at variance with the respectability of some of its newer buildings; there are mean little shops that seem squalidly at home there, and among its queer alleys and courts there are actual courts that in their present shapes and narrowness wormed their crooked ways through the Alsatia that in the days of James and Charles I lay all along there between Fleet Street and the Thames. When Nigel, the hero of Scott's novel, incurred the displeasure of the King by his duel with Lord Dalgarno near the Palace in St. James's Park, he sought temporary refuge in the Alsatia of Whitefriars. The residents in the Temple, when they were in debt and the bailiffs were after them, occasionally fled for safety themselves into that Alsatia which on the city side immediately adjoined their own premises. It was one of these residents, Master Lowestoffe, who first befriended Nigel, took him to his chambers, lent him a shabbier suit to avoid suspicion, and conducted him into Whitefriars by one of the Temple gates; and Scott has drawn a vividly realised picture of



WESTMINSTER ABBEY—
DRYDEN'S TOMB

Nigel's first glimpse of that rascally neighbourhood :

The ancient sanctuary of Whitefriars [he writes] lay considerably lower than the elevated terraces and gardens of the Temple, and was therefore generally involved in the damps and fogs arising from the Thames. The brick buildings crowded closely to each other, for in a place so rarely privileged every foot of ground was valuable ; but erected in many cases by persons whose funds were inadequate to their speculations, the houses were generally insufficient and exhibited lamentable signs of having become ruinous while they were yet new. The wailing of children, the scolding of their mothers, the miserable exhibition of ragged linens hung from the windows to dry, bespoke the wants and distresses of the wretched inhabitants ; while the sounds of complaint were mocked and overwhelmed by the riotous shouts, oaths, and profane songs and boisterous laughter that issued from the alehouses and taverns which, as the signs indicated, were equal in number to all the other houses ; and, that the full character of the place might be evident, several faded, tinselled, and painted females looked boldly at the strangers from their open lattices, or more modestly seemed busied with the cracked flower-pots, filled with mignonette and rosemary, which were disposed in front of the windows to the great risk of passers-by.

Roaming about Whitefriars Street, Dorset

Street, Salisbury Square (in which Thomas Shadwell lived under the Stuarts, and in which Samuel Richardson the novelist lived half a century later), about Magpie Alley, Primrose Hill, Wilderness Lane, Temple Lane, and, especially, Hanging-Sword Alley, you may still realise something of the geography and atmosphere of Alsatia, with its romance and squalor. You approach Magpie Alley and Hanging-Sword Alley by flights of steps, but those up to Hanging-Sword Alley are the narrower, steeper, and higher; at the foot of them stands an ancient tavern, The Harrow, which has a fascinatingly furtive-looking back window and door round the corner on Primrose Hill; and, at the top of the steps, the alley itself is long, dim, very narrow and uneven, and, in spite of all alterations, wears even yet much such a mysterious, dingily rakish air as it must have worn when the bullies and outlaws of Whitefriars loitered and gossiped, quarrelled and duelled in it, or tore furiously along it and down the steps at the warning sound of a horn, to repel some invasion of the sheriffs who, in desperate pursuit of a ruffian they were determined to capture, were attempting to outrage the law of sanctuary.

There is no livelier, more realistic presentation

of the lawless life that was lived in that old Whitefriars district than you get in Thomas Shadwell's comedy, *The Squire of Alsatia*. Shadwell was born shortly before Cromwell became Protector, and he started playwriting when the theatres were reopened after the Restoration. He was Dryden's enemy - envy or jealousy moved him to attack Dryden in print, and ever after Dryden harried him and made a butt of him, especially in his great satires, in *Mac Flecknoe*, and in *Absalom and Achitophel*, so that Shadwell has come down to us labelled as an utterly ridiculous and incompetent person. Dryden insisted that he could do anything but write, and, dealing with various contemporary poets, said :

The rest to some faint meaning make pretence,
But Shadwell never deviates into sense.

Dryden towered immeasurably above him as a satirical poet, but as a dramatist, or, rather, as a writer of comedies, Shadwell was not so far from being his equal. In *The Squire of Alsatia* he rebuilds that lawless, picturesque region ; he had lived in it, and reproduces the habits, manners, and odd slang of its inhabitants with the vividest realism. His characters include Cheatly, whom he describes as " a rascal

who by reason of debts dare not stir out of Whitefriars, but there inveigles young heirs in tail, and helps them to goods and money at great disadvantages ; is bound for them, and shares with them, till he undoes them. A lewd, impudent, debauched fellow, very expert in the cant about the town ” ; there is Shamwell, “ a cousin of the Belfonds, an heir, who being ruined by Cheatly, is made a decoy-duck for others ; not daring to stir out of Alsatia where he lives ” ; there is Captain Hackum, described as “ a blockheaded bully of Alsatia ; a cowardly, impudent, blustering fellow ; formerly a sergeant in Flanders, run from his colours, retreated into Whitefriars for a very small debt, where by the Alsatians he is dubbed a captain ” ; there is Mrs. Hackum, who lets lodgings ; a Parson, finding refuge in Alsatia because he also is in debt ; and the rest of the characters in the play are largely gamblers, thieves, cheats, and rapscallions. The eldest son of Sir William Belfond, dissolute and vicious, is drawn into Whitefriars and in danger of being ruined, and his father and others go into that unwholesome fastness to save him from his friends there, and you can track the son and the father about that locality in the Whitefriars of to-day. Scrapewell, a hypocritical

godly knave who gets a living by swindling young heirs, tells young Belfond how very drunk he was last night, and says, "Why, you broke windows; scoured, broke open a house in Dorset Court." And here still is Dorset Street, the successor of Dorset Court, a little east of Whitefriars Street, and mounting from Tudor Street into Salisbury Square. Throughout the comedy, that elder son plays into the hands of the bullies of Alsatia, swaggering in and about Whitefriars with Cheatly and his gang of rogues; he lodges among them; lives recklessly, dices, squanders his money with them at the depraved George Tavern; and when his younger brother comes into the place to protest against his folly, he excuses himself for having neglected his family by saying he would not disgrace them by coming until his new equipage was ready, but it is ready now and he had intended to visit them to-morrow; and he casually asks his valet, "Is my coach at the gate next to the Green Dragon?" It pleased me to assume that the Green Dragon which till a few years ago stood just outside Whitefriars in Fleet Street was a successor to that tavern; for when an old tavern has been taken down a new one with the same name has usually risen in its place. Sir

William Belfond having on another occasion hunted his erring son out in Alsatia reports to his brother: "I found that the rogue was with his wicked associates at the George in Whitefriars; when they saw I was resolved to see my son and was rough with 'em, Cheatly and his rogues set up a cry against me, 'An arrest! A bailiff! An arrest!' The mob, and all the rakehells in the house and there about the street assembled: I ran, and they had a fair course after me into Fleet Street. Thanks to the vigor I have left, my heels saved my life." He goes there again, this time accompanied by a tipstaff, the constable, and his watchmen; and "the posse of the Friars" draw up to oppose him, and cry out again, "An arrest!" A rabble flocks round the defenders, armed with all sorts of weapons; women with fire-forks, spits, shovels, and other domestic utensils. The mob thrash the constable; his men escape through one of the gates into the Temple, and Sir William is captured, but his younger son arrives in time to effect his rescue, dashing in through the same gateway with "several gentlemen, the porter of the Temple, and Sir William's footmen." The mob is beaten off and Cheatly, Shamwell, and Hackum are taken as prisoners into the Temple,

the porter being instructed to "shut the gate into Whitefriars," when they are safely through. Probably this gate was the one at the end of Tudor Street, which opens into King's Bench Walk.

Six or seven years before Shadwell wrote his *Squire of Alsatia*, Dryden was living in Salisbury Court, on the outskirts of Whitefriars, and there wrote the *Absalom and Achitophel* in which he mercilessly caricatured Shadwell under the name of Og. This is Dryden's picture of Shadwell going home drunk with a link-boy lighting his way through the dark streets :

Og from a treason-tavern rolling home,
 Round as a globe, and liquored every chink,
 Goodly and great he sails behind his link ;
 With all his bulk, there's nothing lost in Og,
 For every inch that is not fool is rogue :
 When wine has given him courage to blaspheme,
 He curses God, but God before cursed him ;
 And if man could have reason, none has more
 That made his paunch so rich and him so poor.
 With wealth he was not trusted, for Heaven knew
 What 'twas of old to pamper up a Jew ;
 To what would he on quail and pheasant swell
 Who even on tripe and carrion could rebel ?

He goes on to pour vitriolic scorn on Shadwell,

and ranks him, for dullness, with the city poet, Elkanah Settle, who wrote odes to the Lord Mayor on Lord Mayor's Days ; and in the more scathing satire, *Mac Flecknoe*, he has Shadwell crowned absolute ruler over all the realm of Nonsense. But Shadwell was no such dullard as all that, nor does there seem any ground for accusing him of treason. Nor was Dryden quite the one to make such a charge. He was little more than a boy when Charles I died ; and his first important poem was an eulogistic elegy on the death of Cromwell ; yet a year or so later he hastened to greet Charles II with a panegyric on his coronation, and with that longer poem, *Astræa Redux*, in which he spoke of the black crimes of those who had so long dispossessed the King, and hailed his return with extravagant flatteries that came strangely from a poet who had so recently said that Cromwell's triumph was not of his own design, but a blessing the people owed to heaven.

3

But Dryden was always easy-going, and went with the times. When the Restoration had reopened the theatres, he became the most

popular of playwrights, and, to suit the changed taste of his day, put more immoralities into his plays than did any of his contemporaries, except that witty, brilliant woman Mrs. Aphra Behn, the first woman in this country who ever took to writing as a profession. She and Dryden, Wycherley, Congreve, Vanbrugh, Farquhar, Killigrew, and other of the Restoration dramatists laid many of their scenes in London, mostly in the western part of the town, and they reflect a London life that was a riot of grossness and debauchery, that had flung off the prudery and restraints of Puritanism and gone at a bound to the other extreme. Charles II was a good-hearted and in many ways a charming person, but I think Macaulay was right in saying that "honour and shame were scarcely more to him than light and darkness to the blind"; any history will tell you the sort of Court he kept at Whitehall; even the more than tolerant Pepys was occasionally shocked, in his *Diary*, at the wild doings of the Duke of Buckingham, Rochester, and other of the King's courtiers and the loose ladies of the Court. And the negation of morality could not reign in Whitehall only; it spread and contaminated all the city. There is no need to pile up evidence of this; the literature

of the time is full of it, and presently, when the Great Plague laid all the city in mourning, the old Puritans said the Plague was the judgment of God upon a London that was lost to all sense of decency and righteousness. Samuel Butler was a whole-hearted Royalist ; he hated and despised the Puritans, and a year or two after Charles's return satirised and ridiculed them and set all London laughing at them with his *Hudibras*, which brought him into high favour with the King, who made much of him, though, in the usual way of careless, good-natured men, he forgot him later on and left him to die in poverty. But there were limits to Butler's complaisance, and nothing I think so fully confirms the worst that had been said of the debauchery of that age than the significant fact that even Butler turned at last and in a scathing satire on the licentiousness of the time lashed the Court and the city with devastating outspokenness. His satire is too long to quote in full, but three brief extracts will indicate what Butler thought of his generation :

'Tis a strange age we've lived in, and a lewd,
As e'er the sun in all his travels viewed ;
An age as vile as ever Justice urged,
Like a fantastic lecher, to be scourged. . . .

For those who heretofore sought private holes,
 Securely in the dark to damn their souls,
 Wore vizards of hypocrisy to steal
 And slink away in masquerade to hell,
 Now bring their crimes into the open sun,
 For all mankind to gaze their worst upon. . . .

He says all society is behaving

As if the laws of nature had been made
 Of purpose only to be disobeyed ;
 Or man had lost his mighty interest
 In having been distinguished from a beast,
 And had no other way but sin and vice
 To be restored again to Paradise.

4

Among all that degeneration in that un-savoury environment, living obscurely in his small house in Artillery Walk, Bunhill Fields, at the back of the burial-ground in City Road, Milton, now turned fifty and grown blind, sat writing, or dictating, his *Paradise Lost*. He makes a lonely and a sombre figure in such surroundings, but in his early days he had a good deal of the Elizabethan gaiety of fancy and a touch of the Elizabethan humour in his composition. When he was a student at Cambridge he must have known Hobson, the carrier ; Milton's family from their home in

Bread Street, Cheapside, no doubt sent letters and other articles to him occasionally by the carrier's cart which plied between London and Cambridge. Hobson's headquarters were at the Bull Inn, which used to stand where Palmerston Buildings are now, in Bishopsgate Street; he was as well known in London as in Cambridge, and is introduced as a familiar name into the dramas of the period. Middleton lays the principal scenes of his *A Chaste Maid of Cheapside* in the shop of Yellowhammer, a goldsmith, and in one scene Sims, a porter, enters "with a letter from a gentleman in Cambridge," and Yellowhammer exclaims, "Oh, one of Hobson's porters; thou art welcome — I told thee, Maud, we should hear from Tim." And in Thomas Randolph's *Hey for Honesty*, Plutus, after reciting his pedigree, says, "Banks the conjuror and old Hobson the carrier were my godfathers." Hobson was something of an eccentric; he had horses in his stable which he let out on hire, but instead of allowing his customers to choose the one each preferred, he made a rule that the horses should go out in rotation, and, so allowing no alternative, has become immortalised in the saying that when one has no alternative one has "Hobson's choice." When this most glorious of carriers

died, Milton, then a young man at Cambridge, wrote two epitaphs on him :

Here lies old Hobson ; death has broke his girt,
 And here, alas ! hath laid him in the dirt. . . .
 'Twas such a shifter that, if truth were known,
 Death was half glad when he had got him down ;
 For he had any time this ten years full
 Dodged with him betwixt Cambridge and the Bull. . . .
 Rest, that gives all men life, gave him his death,
 And too much breathing put him out of breath . . .

by which he meant that, one of London's frequent plagues having broken out, Hobson had been forbidden to go in and out of the city, and he died during that enforced idleness. The two epitaphs are in a frivolous, punning vein much more suggestive of Hood than of Milton. But Milton grew in gravity as he grew in years. All his lighter, more gracious poetry was written before the Civil War, and when the Puritans had triumphed he became Foreign Secretary to Cromwell's Council of State. He may have been present on the bitter January morning, we don't know, when King Charles stepped out of the window in that banqueting house, which still remains in Whitehill, on to the scaffold which had been erected outside. It was Andrew Marvell, a good Puritan and most

incorruptible of men, who describes that scene on the scaffold and, in the middle of a poem in praise of Cromwell, does justice to the dignity and courage of the King in his last moments :

While round the armed bands
 Did clap their bloody hands,
 He nothing common did or mean
 Upon that memorable scene . . .
 But bowed his comely head
 Down as upon a bed.

“Two masked executioners awaited the King as he mounted the scaffold,” writes Green, “which had been erected outside one of the windows of the Banqueting House at Whitehall ; the streets and roofs were thronged with spectators, and a strong body of soldiers stood drawn up beneath. His head fell at the first blow, and as the executioner lifted it to the sight of all a groan of pity and horror burst from the silent crowd.” He, like Cromwell and like Charles II, has been the hero of a good many plays and of a good many novels. A new Westminster Hall has replaced the one in which Charles was tried ; but St. James’s Palace, in which he was imprisoned, and the banqueting house in Whitehall are still visible memorials of his tragedy.

Cromwell, as Protector, lived much in Whitehall, and died there, and to Whitehall went Andrew Marvell to look his last on this man who "had travelled to his end, As silent suns to meet the night descend," and he crowns him with praise in that poem of his on the death of the Lord Protector :

I saw him dead ; a leaden slumber lies,
And mortal sleep over those wakeful eyes . . .

It was nearly two years after Cromwell's death that, General Monk having paved the way for him, Charles II left his place of exile in France and came back amid great rejoicings to England. Evelyn chronicles in his *Diary*, on the 29th May, 1660 :

This day, his Majesty Charles the Second came to London, after a sad and long exile and calamitous suffering both of the King and the Church, being seventeen years. This also was his birthday, and with a triumph of over 20,000 horse and foot, brandishing their swords and shouting with inexpressible joy ; the ways strewed with flowers, the bells ringing, the streets hung with tapestry, fountains running with wine ; the Mayor, Aldermen, and all the Companies in their liveries, chains of gold, and banners ; Lords and Nobles, clad in cloth of silver, gold, and velvet ; the windows and balconies all set with ladies ; trumpets, music and

myriads of people flocking, even so far as from Rochester, so as they were seven hours passing the city, even from two in the afternoon till nine at night. I stood in the Strand and beheld it, and blessed God.

5

To go back a little – between the deaths of Charles I and Cromwell, Milton, as Cromwell's Foreign Secretary, living in Holborn, in a house that backed on Lincoln's Inn Fields, had been pouring out bitter and closely reasoned pamphlets against the enemies of the Commonwealth; justifying the execution of Charles, bringing all his learning in constitutional history to bear in his scornful attacks on the great Leyden professor who took up the cudgels for the Stuarts, and it is to the overstrain these labours involved that he attributed his blindness, when in the sonnet to Cyriac Skinner he says though he has no longer any eyes he bates no jot of heart or hope, and adds :

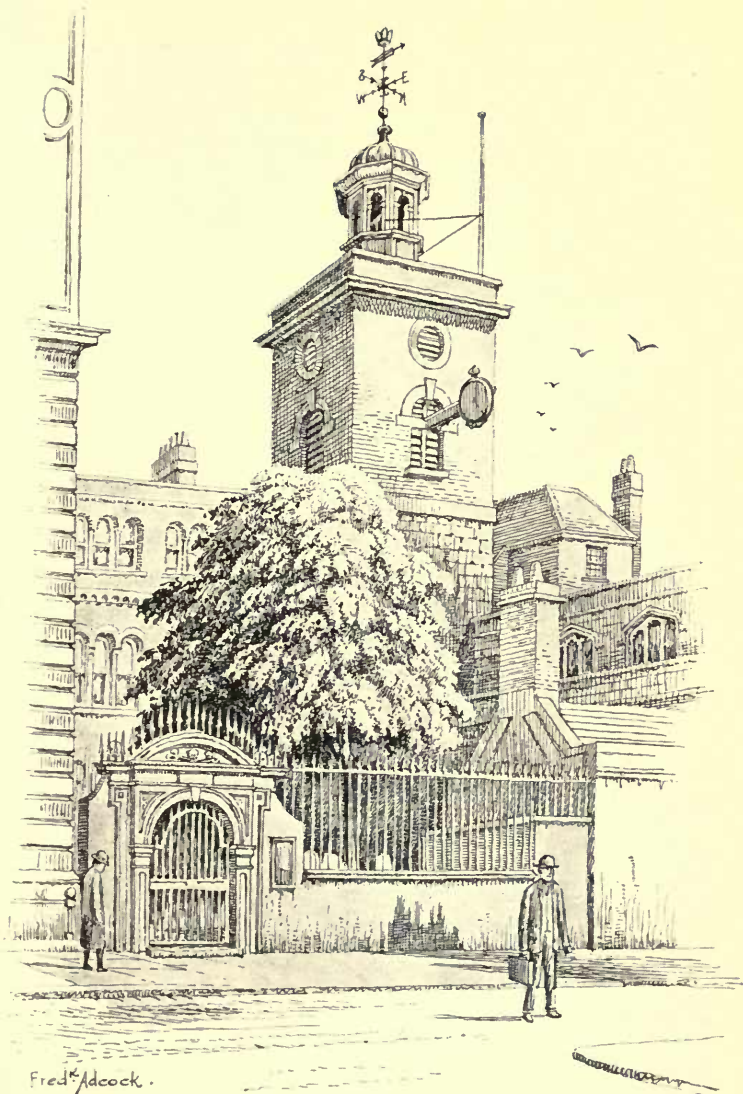
What supports me dost thou ask ?

The conscience, friend, to have lost them overplied

In liberty's defence, my noble task,

Of which all Europe rings from side to side.

Although his loyalty to Cromwell was never



ST. OLAVE — HART STREET, E. C.

shaken, and he made no attempt to propitiate the new order, he was left unmolested after the Restoration. There was talk of prosecuting him for his pamphlet *In Defence of the English People*, but it ended in talk. Charles II was vindictive to some of his old enemies, but he could be generous, and his leniency to Milton is one of the jewels in his crown. In 1665 the blind Milton was living in Artillery Walk with his two daughters. An old Dorsetshire clergyman visited him there, and found him "in a small chamber hung with rusty green, sitting in an elbow chair, and dressed neatly in black; pale, but not cadaverous, his hands and fingers gouty, and with chalk stones." And Richardson, the painter, saw him in Artillery Walk, and describes him as sitting "before his door in a gray coat of coarse cloth, in warm sultry weather, to enjoy the fresh air; and in his room receiving the visits of people of distinguished parts as well as of the quality." In Aubrey's *Lives* is an account of Milton's daily habits. In summer he rose at four; in winter at five. He had a chapter of the Hebrew Bible read to him; then breakfasted, and had books read to him, or dictated to one of his daughters till twelve. After a short walk, he dined at one and spent the afternoon in his garden, in

strolling about the neighbourhood, and in playing his organ. Of evenings, he entertained visitors from six to eight and took a light supper with them. When they were gone, he smoked a quiet pipe, drank a glass of water, and went to bed. His conversation is said to have been extremely pleasant but satirical, and they say he was visited by the learned "much more than he did desire." He completed *Paradise Lost* by 1667, and sold it to Samuel Simmons, a bookseller in Little Britain, for £5. He was to have a second £5 when 1,300 copies were sold, and possibly received that, but the first edition of 1,500 copies was not sold out till a year after he was dead. Dryden, in the full tide of his success as a dramatist, called on Milton to ask permission to put *Paradise Lost* into rhyme and make an opera of it, and Milton, somewhat surprisingly, consented to this being done.

6

But two years before the publication of *Paradise Lost* the last great plague broke out in London; it began in the suburbs, but was soon within the walls of the city. One of the vast plague pits was dug by Artillery Walk in

Bunhill Fields, and Milton left his small house there to seek refuge at Chalfont St. Giles, in Buckinghamshire, where his cottage is still to be seen. Perhaps because it came so late in our history, and was the worst as well as the last, that plague plays a much larger part in the literature of London than all the other plagues put together. Pepys in his *Diary*, without intending to be dramatic, gives a most dramatic little sketch of its first appearance in the town. Writing on the 6th June, 1665, he says :

This day, much against my will, I did in Drury Lane see two or three houses marked with a red cross upon the doors, and " Lord have mercy upon us," writ there ; which was a sad sight to me, being the first of the kind that, to my remembrance, I ever saw. It put me into an ill conception of myself, and my smell, so that I was forced to buy some roll-tobacco to smell and chew, which took away the apprehension.

The plague, on a smaller scale, was such a frequent visitor to London that Pepys was not much alarmed, and in his next entries is going about, dining and enjoying himself with an easy mind, but on the 10th June he writes :

Lay long in bed, and then up and at the office. In the evening home to supper ; and there to my great trouble

hear that the plague is come into the city (though it hath these three or four weeks since its beginning been wholly out of the city) ; but where should it begin but in my good friend and neighbour's, Dr. Burnett, in Fenchurch Street ; which in both points troubles me mightily.

That evening, in some alarm, Pepys put his affairs in order, "in case it should please God to call me away, which God dispose of to his glory." Pepys was living in Seething Lane, near Mark Lane, and used to attend St. Olave Church in Hart Street, close by, and he is buried in that church. Whatever his faults were, he did not lack courage, and when most of the well-to-do, most of the doctors and the parsons, had fled from London into the country, Pepys stayed on all through the plague, and survived it ; and vivid records of what he saw in his goings about are scattered through his *Diary*. He knew that famous Mitre Tavern in Wood Street, and notes on 31st July, "Proctor, the vintner of the Mitre in Wood Street, and his son, are dead this morning there, of the plague." In August he notes that 3,000 have died that week of the plague, and that "people die so that now it seems they are fain to carry the dead to be buried by daylight, the nights not sufficing to do it in."

But it is to Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year* you must go for the most wonderfully realistic story of that dread visitation. Defoe, the son of a butcher living at Cripplegate, was a child in the year of the Great Plague, but you may take it that when he grew up he knew many people who had passed through that unimaginably terrible time, and no subsequent records have essentially falsified his accounts; even the invaluable detailed history of it we have had recently from Mr. Walter G. Bell only shows Defoe to have been mistaken in some of his figures, and in a proclamation of the Lord Mayor's which he reprints; it takes nothing from the truth of the amazing picture he has left us. Being a good deal about that part of the city when I first read Defoe's *Journal*, I could not for a long time after pass through Tokenhouse Yard without recalling one haunting passage. When the plague had been increasing for some days -

Passing through Tokenhouse Yard, in Lothbury [he writes], of a sudden a casement violently opened just over my head, and a woman gave three frightful screeches, and then cried, "Oh! death, death, death!" in a most inimitable tone, and which struck me with horror and chilliness in my very blood. There was

nobody to be seen in the whole street, neither did any other window open, for people had no curiosity now in any case, nor could anybody help one another ; so I went on to pass into Bell Alley.

Wherever you go, indeed, about central London you pass by places Defoe has made memorable in his *Journal of the Plague Year*. He tells you of frantic preachers who ran hither and thither by day and night crying out dreadfully ; of one in particular who predicted : " Yet forty days and London shall be destroyed." The imaginary writer of the *Journal* describes how he saw the grass growing along Bishopsgate, and the dead being buried in huge pits in Hand Alley, Bishopsgate, and in Petticoat Lane :

As I went along Houndsditch [he says] one morning about eight o'clock, there was a great noise . . . the outcry was loud enough to prompt my curiosity, and I called to one, who looked out of a window, and asked what was the matter. A watchman, it seems, had been employed to keep his post at the door of a house which was infected, or said to be infected, and was shut up. He had been there all night, for two nights together, as he told his story, and the day-watchman had been there one day, and was now come to relieve him. All this while no noise had been heard in the house, no light had been seen, they called for nothing, and sent

him no errands, which used to be the chief business of the watchman, neither had they given him any disturbance, as he said, from Monday afternoon, when he heard a great crying and screaming in the house, which as he supposed, was occasioned by some of the family dying just at that time. It seems the night before, the dead-cart, as it was called, had been stopped there, and a servant maid had been brought down to the door dead, and the buriers or bearers, as they were called, put her into the cart, wrapped only in a green rug, and carried her away. The watchman had knocked at the door, it seems, when he heard that noise and crying, as above, and nobody answered a great while; but at last one looked out and said, with an angry quick tone, and yet in a kind of crying voice, or a voice of one that was crying, "What d'you want, that you make such a knocking?" He answered, "I am the watchman. What is the matter?" The person answered, "What is that to you? Stop the dead-cart." This it seems was about one o'clock; soon after, as the fellow said, he stopped the dead-cart, and then knocked again, but nobody answered. He continued knocking, and the bellman called out several times, "Bring out your dead"; but nobody answered, till the man that drove the cart being called to other houses, would stay no longer, and drove away.

The watchman knew not what to make of all this, so he let them alone till the morning-man, or day-watchman as they called him, came to relieve him; giving him an account of the particulars, they knocked at the door a great while, but nobody answered, and they observed

that the window or casement at which the person looked out who had answered before, continued open, being up two pair of stairs. Upon this the two men, to satisfy their curiosity, got a long ladder, and one of them went up to the window and looked into the room, where he saw a woman lying dead upon the floor, but though he called aloud, and putting in his long staff knocked hard on the floor, yet nobody stirred or answered, neither could he hear any noise in the house. He came down again upon this, and acquainted his fellow, who went up also, but finding it just so, they resolved to acquaint either the Lord Mayor or some other magistrate of it. The magistrate, it seems, upon the information of the two men, ordered the house to be broke open, a constable and other persons being appointed to be present that nothing might be plundered; and accordingly it was so done, when nobody was found in the house but that young woman who, having been infected and past recovery, the rest had left her to die by herself, and every one gone, having found some way to delude the watchman and to get open the door, or get out at some back-door, or over the tops of the houses, so that he knew nothing of it; and as to those cries and shrieks which he heard, it was supposed they were the passionate cries of the family at this bitter parting, which to be sure it was to them all, this being the sister to the mistress of the family. The man of the house, his wife, several children and servants, being all gone and fled whether sick or sound, that I could never learn, nor, indeed, did I make much enquiry after it.

The Church of St. Botolph, Aldgate, stands at the eastern corner of Houndsditch, and behind the churchyard still runs the alley that Defoe mentions, opening out of Houndsditch ; beyond the wall of the churchyard the alley turns to the right and brings you into Aldgate, against the Three Nuns Tavern, a successor to the inn of the same name referred to in the *Journal of the Plague*. The imaginary citizen who kept the *Journal* lived in Aldgate, and declares that he had no fears for his personal safety until "they dug the great pit in the churchyard of our parish of Aldgate." He calls it a "dreadful gulf," and says that people of the parish protested against the unnecessary size of it, but many other pits had already been filled, and this too was full before the plague had run its course.

A terrible pit it was [says the *Diary*], and I could not resist my curiosity to go and see it ; . . . I doubt not but that there may be some ancient persons alive in the parish who are able to show even in what place of the churchyard the pit lay better than I can ; the mark of it also was many years to be seen in the churchyard on the surface, lying in length parallel with the passage that goes by the west wall of the churchyard, out of Houndsditch, and turns east again into Whitechapel, coming out near the Three Nuns Inn.

The writer goes on to tell, in Defoe's minutely realistic fashion, of the horrors and tragic despair that haunted its black depth; how carts came up by night loaded with the dead, who were pitched into it; how, in the light of fires and torches, men would come weeping and raging frantically to the pit's edge; how poor creatures, mad with knowing that they were stricken with the plague, would rush across the churchyard and fling themselves down upon the bodies in that appalling hole. On the 10th September, 1665, says the writer of the *Journal*, "my curiosity led, or rather drove me to go and see this pit again." He knew the sexton, who was willing to admit him into the churchyard, but was trying to dissuade him from the risk of going, when, says the *Journal*,

I saw two links come over from the end of the Minorities [which is almost opposite the church] and heard the bellman, and then appeared a dead-cart, as they called it, coming over the streets; so I could no longer resist my desire of seeing, and went in.

He found lingering by the pit, a weeping wretch wrapped in a brown cloak; his wife and several of his children were in this cart that was just arriving, and when he saw "the cart turned

round and the bodies shot into the pit promiscuously," he was so overcome that he fell into a swoon. When he recovered, the bearers "led him away to the Pye Tavern, over against the end of Houndsditch, where, it seems, the man was known, and where they took care of him." As the author of the *Journal* was leaving the churchyard, "and turning up the street towards my own house, I saw another cart with links, and a bellman going before, coming out of Harrow Alley, in the Butcher-row, on the other side of the way."

He goes on to tell of that Pye Tavern. "A dreadful set of fellows," in whom the plague had produced a spirit of reckless defiance, drank and revelled there uproariously.

They sat generally in a room next the street; and as they always kept late hours, so when the dead-cart came across the street end to go into Houndsditch which was in view of the tavern windows, they would frequently open the windows as soon as they heard the bell, and look out at them; and as they might often hear sad lamentations of the people in the streets, or at their windows, as the carts went along, they would make their impudent mocks and jeers at them, especially if they heard the poor people call upon God to have mercy upon them, as many would do at those times, in their ordinary passing along the streets.

It is difficult to believe that such a Walpurgis-night tavern ever stood among the shabby, decorous shops at that end of Houndsditch, with those rowdy, reckless drunkards lounging at its windows making the ghastly night more ghastly. It has gone like an evil dream, but here still is the churchyard, once a place of horror, looking tranquil enough now in the afternoon sunlight, with its worn, ancient tombstones brooding amid the long grass, the scar of that grisly pit so entirely healed that you can see no trace of it.

The passage out of Houndsditch by the wall at the back of the churchyard takes you near the edge of that invisible pit ; and, following the turn of the passage to the right, we come out upon Aldgate, by the Three Nuns Tavern, and Defoe's imaginary writer of the *Journal* says, " I lived without Aldgate, about midway between Aldgate Church and Whitechapel Bars, on the left hand, or north side of the street." So he must have lived facing the Butcher Row that he talks of, and that still remains, keeping its ancient character and much of its ancient aspect. *The Journal of the Plague* and Harrison Ainsworth's best novel, *Old St. Paul's* (which draws freely on Defoe for scenes and incidents), makes all London, from Holborn and the Strand

to Aldgate, strangely and mysteriously alive with memories of that blackest year in the city's history ; certain streets and corners belong for ever to some unforgettable development of the plague, and most of these remembrances are charged with misery and terror, but at the corner of the Minories, where Defoe's journalist saw the links coming with the dead-cart, there are happier echoes in the air, for Defoe (or his journalist) describes how, when the worst of the plague was spent at last, and the citizens moving abroad more freely again,

It was a common thing to meet people in the street that were strangers, and that we knew nothing of at all, expressing their surprise. Going one day through Aldgate, and a pretty many people being passing and repassing, there comes a man out of the end of the Minories, and looking a little up the street and down, he throws his hands abroad : Lord, what an alteration is here ! Why, last week I came along and hardly anybody was to be seen. Another man, I heard him, adds to his words : 'Tis all wonderful. 'Tis all a dream. Blessed be God, says a third man, and let us give thanks to Him, for 'tis all His own doing. Human help and human skill was at an end. These were all strangers to one another ; but such salutations as these were frequent in the street every day ; and in spite of a loose behaviour, the very common people went along the streets giving thanks to God for their deliverance.

Less than a year after that deliverance, London was suffering under a second terrible scourge, and to Pepys we may go again for the first sight of its coming. On Sunday, 2nd September, 1666, he makes this entry :

Jane called us up about three of the morning to tell us of a great fire they saw in the city. So I rose and slipped on my night-gown, and went to her window, and thought it to be at the back of Mark Lane at the farthest ; but, being unused to such fires as followed, I thought it far enough off ; and so went to bed again and to sleep. About seven rose again to dress myself, and there looked out of the window, and saw the fire not so much as it was, and further off. By and by, Jane comes and tells me that she hears above 300 houses have been burned down by the fire we saw, and that it is now burning down all Fish Street, by London Bridge.

Pepys goes on to tell how presently he walked round to the Tower, and there, from one of the high places,

did see the houses at the end of the bridge all on fire, and an infinite great fire on this and the other side the end of the bridge ; which among other people, did trouble me for poor little Mitchell and our Sarah on the bridge. So down, with my heart full of trouble, to the Lieutenant of the Tower, who tells me that it began

this morning in the King's baker's house in Pudding Lane, and that it hath burned St. Magnus Church, and most part of Fish Street already.

He went down to the river, and rowed out in a boat, and saw that his friend Mitchell's house on the bridge was burned, and that the other houses were burned as far as the Old Swan (which vanished inn survives there, by the way, in the name of the Old Swan Pier). He saw people bringing their furniture and goods out and piling them in lighters and mooring them in the river; poor people staying in their houses along the riverside as long as they dared, then running out as the fire advanced, and leaping into boats. A mighty wind was blowing and driving the fire all across the city, and seeing nobody trying to put out the flames – all bent on saving their goods or on running away to save themselves – Pepys was rowed on up to Whitehall and went to see the King. He reported what he had seen, and “the King commanded me to go to my Lord Mayor and command him to spare no houses, but to pull down before the fire every way.” Pepys went back to the city by coach, and getting out at St. Paul's, which had not yet been reached by the fire,

there walked along Watling Street as well as I could, every creature coming away loaden with goods to save, and here and there sick people carried away in beds. At last met my Lord Mayor in Cannon Street, like a man spent, with a handkercher about his neck. To the King's message he cried like a fainting woman, "Lord what can I do? I am spent. People will not obey me. I have been pulling down houses, but the fire overtakes us faster than we can do it," and that for himself he must go and refresh himself, having been up all night. So he left me, and I him, and walked home, seeing people all almost distracted, and no manner of means used to quench the fire. The houses too so very thick hereabouts and full of matter for burning, as pitch and tar, in Thames Street; and warehouses of oil, and wines and brandy. Here I saw Mr. Isaake Houblon, the handsome man, prettily dressed and dirty, at his door in Dowgate, receiving some of his brother's things, whose houses were on fire, and as he says, have been removed twice already; and he doubts (as it soon proved) that they must be in a little time removed from his house also, which was a sad consideration. And to see the churches all filling with goods by people who themselves should have been quietly there at this time.

Pepys got back home about noon to find some guests waiting for him, and they were all troubled. "However," he adds, "we had an extraordinary good dinner, and as merry as at this time we could be." In the evening, he

and his wife and some friends rowed across the river to Bankside and sat in a little alehouse there and watched the fire grow ; “ and,” says he, “ as it grew darker, it appeared more and more, and in corners and upon steeples, and between churches and houses, as far as we could see up the hill of the city, in a most horrid, malicious bloody flame, not like the fine flame of an ordinary fire.”

That was only the beginning. For four days the fire raged, the wind spreading it by blowing blazing fragments broadcast ; then, having started in Pudding Lane, by London Bridge, it went out of its own accord at Pie Corner, in Smithfield. All the city was in ruins, but though the Puritans might proclaim it as a visitation on London for its sins, the fire was really a blessing in disguise – it purified it of the plague, swept away masses of old unwholesome wooden houses ; and, as Mr. Walter G. Bell says in his full and authoritative history of the Great Fire, “ no other single incident in London’s record of over a thousand years has had such influence on its fortunes and its future. It destroyed the last vestiges of London as an ecclesiastic and monastic city, and when rebuilt upon the ruins, London became the wholly commercial city that we know.” Wren erected

the Monument on Fish Street Hill to commemorate the fire, and when Titus Oates swore, and produced evidence, that the fire had been caused by eighty friars and priests who had plotted to destroy London, an inscription to that effect was put upon it. Titus was in due course proved to be a perjurer, but it was not until about a century after Pope had written of

Where London's column pointing to the skies,
Like a tall bully lifts the head and lies,

that the inscription was removed, and the Fire accepted as what it was – an accident, and, as I say, on the whole, a very lucky accident. The picturesque, unhealthy old London was almost entirely blotted out, and when the Stuart dynasty ended a new age found a new London waiting for it.

I

It would not be quite correct to say that Romance went out with the Stuarts and Manners came in with Queen Anne; but Manners in earlier ages, when they had any, were more natural, more unaffected. The sophisticated beaux and belles in the days of Queen Anne and the Georges made a fine art of courtesy; and the artifice with which they conducted their lives got into their literature. The London that grew up after the Great Fire was less carelessly picturesque than its predecessor had been; it was no longer a motley, happy-go-lucky muddle of houses of all periods, but had become new and formal, more uniform in its architecture, and its citizens were to a large extent undergoing a similar change—they were practising a more deliberate and superficial politeness, assuming soberer airs without being really more sober than their fathers had been. The Court was no longer a centre of riotous living—it was humdrum and decorous enough

until the later Georgian days, even a little dull ; and for a time London was sensitive to that change of atmosphere and somewhat subdued by it. The Muses left the country and came to town, and adopted the style and tone of the town ; forgot what Milton had called their native wood-notes wild, curled their hair, suppressed their fine frenzies, their emotional and high imaginative tendencies, and cultivated a wit, a studied grace and artificiality of sentiment that conformed to the genteel spirit of the time. The poetic feet of the period walked for the most part with a processional tread ; the poets expressing themselves in neat couplets found their chief inspiration in the social life and etiquette of the drawing-room, the coffee-house, the streets and haunts of fashion. The vulgarities of the raw country offended their nicer taste, and when they wrote of rural scenes, their sheep were white and woolly, and you saw their shepherds as rather elegant creatures who sang a cultivated baritone and had their shoes and their knee-breeches tied up with dainty ribands.

But though these were the prevailing elements, they were not unmixed with robuster qualities, and you cannot accommodate the whole of the eighteenth century with any one

label. Tennyson might write of those days as

Teacup times of hood and hoop,
And when the patch was worn,

but while Pope and his school had the Muses in curls and crinolines, and Richardson was presently writing novels that portrayed a similar social formality of manners that were as exacting and more prudish, Defoe and Fielding and Smollett were showing there was still a good deal of human nature about in London that was not much affected by the rules of that exquisite game. Our own Austin Dobson, who loved the finenesses and formalities of the eighteenth century, has most wonderfully recaptured its spirit in many of his poems and essays, and writes of how

The ladies of St. James's
Go swinging to the play ;
Their footmen run before them
With " Stand by ! " " Clear the way ! "

and of how those ladies of the West End

Wear satin on their backs ;
They sit all night at ombre,
With candles all of wax,

of how

They are so fine and fair
 You'd think a box of essences
 Was broken in the air,

and

They're painted to the eyes,
 Their white it stays for ever,
 Their red it never dies ;

but Defoe has very different tales to tell in *Moll Flanders* and in *Colonel Jack* ; and they are not all teacup times and people of the polite world in Smollett's or in Fielding's novels. Perhaps the best all-round pictures of the days of Anne and the early Georgian era are to be found in *The Tatler* and *Spectator* of Addison and Steele, and in the papers of those periodical essayists who imitated and succeeded them. In the first number of *The Spectator*, which tells you that letters should be directed to him at Mr. Buckley's in Little Britain, Addison writes :

I have passed my latter years in this city, where I am frequently seen in most public places. There is no place of general resort where I do not frequently make my appearance ; sometimes I am seen thrusting my head into a round of politicians at Will's and listening with great attention. Sometimes I smoke a pipe at

Child's, and whilst I seem attentive to nothing but the *Postman*, overhear the conversation of every table in the room. I appear on Sunday nights at St. James's coffee-house. My face is likewise very well known at the Grecian, the Cocoa-tree, and in the theatres both of Drury Lane and the Haymarket. I have been taken for a merchant on the exchange for above these ten years, and sometimes pass for a Jew in the assembly of stock-jobbers at Jonathan's.

Jonathan's was a coffee-house in Change Alley, off Cornhill, which was much used by gamblers and the Stock Exchange gentry, and you may still visit the alley, though the house is gone from it. The *Postman* which absorbed Addison at Child's was one of the newspapers of the day, and Child's was a coffee-house in St. Paul's Churchyard. Coffee and tea had only lately been introduced into England, and coffee-houses had sprung up as pioneers of our present-day clubs. Of the other coffee-houses Addison mentions, St. James's was in St. James's Street, three doors from the south-west corner, and Swift and Gay, as well as Addison and Steele, were among its frequenters. In the time of the third George, Dr. Johnson, Garrick, Burke, Reynolds, Goldsmith, and their set used to meet there, and it was there the dispute occurred that prompted Goldsmith to write

his *Retaliation*. The Cocoa-tree mentioned by Addison was also in St. James's Street, and Will's was the famous coffee-house at 21 Russell Street, Covent Garden, where, until a few years before, Dryden had his winter seat by the fire-side and his summer seat in the balcony as chief of the wits and men of letters who made it their place of resort, and Addison set up a rival court of the wits at Button's Coffee-house on the opposite side of the street. The Grecian Coffee-house, named by Addison in that passage from *The Spectator*, stood in Devereux Court, opposite the Law Courts in the Strand, and its successor, the Devereux Tavern, still has the bust of Lord Essex over its door as it used to stand over the Grecian. Addison, Steele, Goldsmith, Akenside, Sir Isaac Newton, all used the Grecian during Georgian days, and a story told of it in Dr. King's anecdotes is very typical of the period. "I remember two gentlemen who were constant companions," he writes, "disputing one evening at the Grecian Coffee-house, concerning the accent of a Greek word. The dispute was carried to such a length that the two friends thought proper to determine it with their swords. For this purpose they stept out into Devereux Court, where one of them (whose name, if I remember right, was

Fitzgerald) was run through the body and died on the spot." The dull, placid Devereux Court of to-day does not suggest that its silence was ever broken by such a headlong tragedy.

2

To return to *The Spectator* — there are other essays in it deploring the scandalous appearance of so many beggars about the city ; describing a prize fight ; touching on the vanities of the ladies ; the gambling and other bad habits of the fine gentlemen ; and there is one from which I make a long extract because it gives something of a general survey of eighteenth-century London out of doors :

I lay one night last week at Richmond [writes Steele] and being restless, not out of dissatisfaction, but a certain busy inclination one sometimes has, I rose at four in the morning and took boat for London, with a resolution to rove by boat and coach for the next four and twenty hours. . . . The hours of the day and night are taken up in the cities of London and Westminster by people as different from each other as those who are born in different centuries. Men of six o'clock give way to those of nine, they of nine to the generation of twelve ; and they of twelve disappear and make room for the fashionable world, who have made two o'clock

the noon of the day. When we first put off from the shore [at Richmond] we soon fell in with a fleet of gardeners, bound for the several market-ports of London ; and it was the most pleasing scene imaginable to see the cheerfulness with which these industrious people plyed their way to a certain sale of their goods. It was very easy to observe by their sailing, and the countenances of the ruddy virgins who were their supercargoes, the part of the town to which they were bound. There was an air in the purveyors for Covent Garden, who frequently converse with morning rakes [the wild young gentlemen of the town who were going home as we say nowadays with the milk], an air very unlike the seeming sobriety of those bound for Stocks Market. [The market then in the centre of the city by the Mansion House.]

Nothing remarkable happened on our voyage ; but I landed with ten sail of apricot boats at Strand Bridge – [a bridge across a wide stream that ran across the Strand down Wellington Street to the Thames, long before Waterloo Bridge was dreamt of] – after having put in at Nine Elms to take in melons consigned by Mr. Cuffe, of that place, to Sarah Sewell and Company at their stall in Covent Garden. We arrived at Strand Bridge at six of the clock, and were unloading, when the hackney coachmen of the foregoing night took their leave of each other at the Dark House [probably a tavern thereabouts] to go to bed before the day was too far spent. Chimney sweepers passed by us as we made up to the Market, and some raillery happened between one of the fruit wenches and those black men, about

the Devil and Eve, with allusion to their several professions. I could not believe any place more entertaining than Covent Garden ; where I strolled from one fruit shop to another, with crowds of agreeable young women around me who were purchasing fruit for their respective families. It was almost eight of the clock before I could leave that variety of objects. I took coach and followed a young lady, who tripped into another just before me, attended by her maid. I saw immediately she was of the family of the Vainloves. There are a set of these who, of all things, affect the play of Blindman's-buff, and leading men into love for they know not whom who are fled they know not where. This sort of woman is usually a jaunty slattern ; she hangs on her clothes, plays her head, varies her posture, and changes place incessantly, and all with an appearance of striving at the same time to hide herself, and yet give you to understand she is in humour to laugh at you. You must have often seen the coachmen make signs with their fingers, as they drive by each other, to intimate how much they have got that day. They can carry on that language (with each other) to give intelligence where they are driving. In an instant my coachman took the wink to pursue, and the lady's driver gave the hint that he was going through Long Lane toward St. James's.

Steele goes on to describe how for the sake of diversion – a diversion popular with the gallants of the time – his coach followed the lady's all over the town, he continuing to

exchange glances and to bow to her whenever his coach could come abreast with hers, until at last he lost her among the traffic. On inquiring about her of his driver, he learned that she was what was known as a Silkworm. "I was surprised," he writes, "with this phrase, but found it was cant among the hackney fraternity for their best customers, women who ramble twice or thrice a week from shop to shop, to turn over all the goods in town without buying anything. [I have been told by people who ought to know that the Silkworm still exists among us.]

"The day of people of fashion began now to break," Steele continues, "and carts and hacks were mingled with equipages of show and vanity, when I resolved to walk it out of cheapness." But while he stood listening to a ballad singer, a beggar came and pitched a tale that moved his pity and drew money from him, so, as this too often happened to him, he decided it would be cheaper after all to ride, and took another coach and drove toward the city, pleased to see how brightly alive the world had become since he left Richmond. "This satisfaction increased," he says, "as I moved toward the city, and gay signs, well-disposed streets, magnificent public structures, and wealthy

shops adorned with contented faces made the joy still rising till we came into the centre of the city, and centre of the world of trade, the Exchange of London." He rambled all over the Exchange, dined at a fivepenny ordinary (which would mean about a shilling to-day, so they needed no Commission to inquire into the price of meat). "But before five in the afternoon [he goes on] I left the city, came to my common scene of Covent Garden, and passed the evening at Will's in attending the discourses of several sets of people, who relieved each other within my hearing on the subject of cards, dice, love, learning and politics. This last subject kept me till I heard the streets in the possession of the bell-man, who had now the world to himself and cried, 'Past two o'clock.' This roused me from my seat." Steele then went out and set off for home, having hired a linkman to light the way for him with his torch, and learning in talk with this man that he had a family, and how small were his midnight earnings, at the end of the journey he gave the linkman sixpence instead of the twopence which was his proper fee. At that date (1712) Steele was living in Bloomsbury Square, so from Russell Street, Covent Garden, he must have had about a mile's walk by torchlight for his money.

3

Three years before Steele had that early morning adventure into London, Thomas Baker, who wrote and edited a rival to *The Tatler* called *The Female Tatler*, published an odd little sketch of Steele's eccentric, absent-minded appearance in the street. He says he saw Steele at the beginning of December, at the corner of St. James's Street. "It was a great fog, yet the squire wore his hat under his left arm, and, as if that side had been lame, all the stress of his gait was laid upon the other; he stooped very much forward, and whenever his right foot came to the ground, which was always set down with a more than ordinary and affected force, his cane, with a great vibration of the arm, struck the stones, whilst a violent jerk of his head kept time with the latter." He goes on to sneer at Steele for behaving so eccentrically while, in his periodical essays, he ridiculed and condemned eccentricity in others. But Steele, like the rest of us, was inconsistent in many ways; he preached thrift, sobriety, and all the virtues, but indulged too freely in the bottle, was continually in debt, and sometimes hiding from his creditors and borrowing money from Addison and other of

his friends to avoid being clapped into the debtors' prison. He had much of the simplicity and charm and irresponsibility with which John Gay won the affection of all his contemporaries, and even found his way to the heart of the saturnine Swift. It was Swift who suggested to Gay the writing of *The Beggar's Opera*, and, like Pope, Arbuthnot, and the rest of that group, was always ready to advise him and help him out of his difficulties. The phenomenal success of *The Beggar's Opera* made Gay rich when it was first produced, and whenever it has been revived ever since it has brought him back out of his twilight obscurity into another brief but blazing day of notoriety. Its presentment of highway and general criminal life in Newgate and out of it disguises a good deal of the real life of the time in a riot of burlesque humour and pretty sentiment; but in his *Trivia, or the Art of Walking the Streets of London*, Gay produced a poem that is invaluable as a minutely realistic panorama of the day and night life of the London streets of the eighteenth century, whatever may be its value as poetry. He starts with practical advice on what you should wear in different weathers. If the shoeblacks are at their stands, shouting noisily "Clean your shoes," and

L O N D O N M E M O R I E S

When late their miry sides stage coaches show,
And their stiff horses through the town move slow,

then, knowing the ways are wet and muddy,
you should wear no fancy shoes, but

Let firm, well-hammered soles protect thy feet,

put on your worst wig, and a stout coat. But

When on his box the nodding coachman snores,
And dreams of fancied fares ; when tavern doors
The chairmen idly crowd, then ne'er refuse
To trust thy busy steps in thinner shoes,

for when chairmen and coachmen are un-
employed it is a sign of fine weather. Having
fully advised you on your dress for outdoors, he
proceeds to range the town, beginning early
in the morning when

No tides of passengers the streets molest,

and you meet only draggled damsels bearing
fish from Billingsgate, the milkmaids on their
rounds with donkey-carts, and presently see
the shops beginning to open, and carts and
coaches to come abroad. He counsels you, if
you are dressed in black, to avoid rubbing



NO. 21 RUSSELL STREET, COVENT GARDEN
— FORMERLY WILL'S COFFEE HOUSE

shoulders in the narrow streets with bakers, chimney-sweeps, hoarse small-coal men, dustmen, tallow chandlers, butchers, and other such tradesmen who are out delivering their goods. He urges you to be civil and allow any woman you meet to go past you by the wall, so that there may be no risk of her stepping off the narrow pavement into the dirty gutter, or having the mud from passing vehicles flung over her. If you go into unknown streets, take a licensed porter with you for safety, and never ask your way of the prentices, who take a delight in sending strangers astray. He warns you to avoid any crowd, which is bound to harbour watchful pickpockets, and to mind the boys sweeping the shop fronts don't spatter dirt over your stockinged calves, and to step round them in the road when brewers have got a rope stretched from their cart across into deep cellars and are delivering beer, or carmen are preparing to throw down billets of wood to be taken into some of the houses. He counsels you, if you see anybody in the pillory, to keep clear of it, for turnips and bad eggs are pretty sure to be raining on the poor wretch, and a random throw may send some of the yolk trickling over your face. You get a suggestion of the narrow streets again when he urges

you to avoid streets that have no sidewalks defended by a line of posts, or you will be in danger if two carts should meet there.

Who would of Watling street the dangers share
When the broad pavement of Cheapside is near ?

And having talked of the squalor and smells of tallow, oil, cheese, and other things in Thames Street, he sings of the safe pavements, sweet odours from the shops of the perfumers, and bright ribbons in the windows of Pall Mall ; though even here there may be a broken pavement, and if you step carelessly on a loose stone muddy water may spurt up and sully your elegance. He takes you through Drury Lane, Covent Garden, all about the town, and prompts you to run for shelter if the prentices are playing football in one of the streets and you see the ball soaring in the air, striking shop windows, and hear it making the sashes jingle on the penthouse before the shops. He touches in a memory of when the Thames was lately frozen over for three months, and booths were erected and a fair held on the ice. You pass a house with its knocker tied up with crape because somebody within is dead ; you hear the various cries of hawkers in the streets ; see the beau in his gilded

chariot overturned by a lumbering dustman's cart which tries to pass him ; you look in at the various markets with him, linger at the book-shops and see what new books are just out – in a word, all the miscellaneous life of London by day is unrolled before you. Then you pass with him to a view of the streets by night, when the watchmen are going their rounds, the linkmen are lighting late passengers home, rakes are revelling, breaking windows by mischievously throwing coppers at them, and the dreaded Mohocks are abroad – those wild young men who molest women and peaceful citizens in the dark roads – and all sorts of desperate and perilous adventures in the streets are possible. But I must quit these scenes, after I have quoted a vivid little sketch of an incident that happens by that quaint huddle of old shops with overhanging upper stories which was known as Butcher's Row, and included a coffee-house that numbered Dr. Johnson among its customers, and used to stretch along over the ground now occupied by the Law Courts, in the Strand :

Where the fair columns of St. Clement stand,
Whose straightened bounds encroach upon the Strand ;
Where the low penthouse bows the walker's head,
And the rough pavement wounds the yielding tread ;

Where not a post protects the narrow space,
 And, strung in twines, combs dangle in thy face,
 Summon at once thy courage, rouse thy care,
 Stand firm, look back, be resolute, beware.
 Forth issuing from steep lanes, the collier's steeds
 Drag the black load ; another cart succeeds ;
 Team follows team, crowds heaped on crowds appear,
 And wait impatient till the road grows clear.
 Now all the pavement sounds with trampling feet,
 And the mixed hurry barricades the street.
 Entangled here, the wagon's lengthened team
 Cracks the tough harness ; here a ponderous beam
 Lies overturned athwart ; for slaughter fed,
 Here lowing bullocks raise the hornèd head.
 Now oaths grow loud, with coaches coaches jar,
 And the smart blow provokes the sturdy war ;
 From the high box they whirl the thong around,
 And with the twining lash their shins resound.
 Their rage ferments, more dangerous wounds they try,
 And the blood gushes down the painful eye,
 And now on foot the frowning warriors light,
 And with their ponderous fists renew the fight ;
 Blow answers blow, their cheeks are smeared with blood,
 Till down they fall, and grappling roll in mud.

So, you see, they had their traffic problems
 in the eighteenth century, as we have ours in
 the twentieth, and theirs were worse than ours,
 for nowadays, with

The policeman with uplifted hand
 Conducting the orchestral Strand,

we have at least reduced ours to some sort of order, and Gay's long line of coal-carts and great herd of cattle are no longer allowed at dusk to come pouring down Bell Lane by the Law Courts into the Strand and choke it up while the colliers climb down and join in Homeric combat with the drovers. We have our street troubles, but they are not so bad as that.

4

Swift, again, in one of his poems gives you a description of London's streets early in the morning, and in another of a city shower. In other of his poems, neatly, lightly, satirically, he gives you pictures of the fashionable lady and the more genteel, indoor life of the town; he has a poem on the South Sea Bubble, that bogus commercial enterprise which agitated all London for weeks, kept the Exchange in an uproar, and ruined hundreds of people. One of the most scathing things he ever wrote is his elegy on the great Duke of Marlborough, whom Addison had glorified in an ode after the victorious battle of Blenheim. Swift sees no glory in war; he has a vision of the Duke's funeral procession passing through the street from Marlborough House in Pall Mall to Westminster Abbey,

with no widows and orphans weeping in its train, but

He had these honours in his day,
True to his profit and his pride,
He made them weep before he died ;

and the last eight lines -

Come hither, all ye empty things,
Ye bubbles raised by breath of kings . . .

are terrible in their concentrated passion and scorn. Swift is more whimsically cynical in the verses on his own death, foreseeing how the Court ladies hear the news and discuss it indifferently, while they play cards, and that

Poor Pope would grieve a month, and Gay
A week, and Arbuthnot a day.

Swift's letters to Stella, almost the only wholly charming things he ever wrote, are full of glimpses of how he spent his time in the London he knew. He tells you of his meetings with Sterne, with Pope, Addison, and others, and how often he walked with them in Hyde Park ; of his visits to Court and Government officials ; with whom and where he dined, and with whom

he went to take tea. On one occasion he went in a sedan to dine with Lewis of the secretary's office, and says, "The chairmen that carried me squeezed a great fellow against a wall, who wisely turned his back, and broke one of the side glasses in a thousand pieces. I fell a scolding, pretended I was like to be cut to pieces, and made them set down the chair in the Park, while they picked out the bits of glass; and when I paid them, I quarrelled still, so they dared not grumble and I came off for my fare, but I was plaguy afraid they would have said, 'God bless your honour, will not you give us something for our glass?'" An anecdote which illustrates the difficulties of the narrow streets and that if Swift could be generous he could on occasion be mean.

Duels in Hyde Park were of common occurrence, and in a letter to Stella, Swift records one of the most famous duels of his day, one that Thackeray freely adapted for that duel in *Esmond* between Viscount Esmond and Lord Mohun.

Before this comes to your hands [writes Swift, on November 15, 1712] you will have heard of the most terrible accident that has almost ever happened. This morning at eight, my man brought me word that Duke Hamilton had fought with Lord Mohun, and killed him and was brought home wounded. I immediately sent

him to the Duke's house in St. James's Square ; but the porter could hardly answer for tears, and a great rabble was about the house. In short, they fought at seven this morning ; the dog Mohun was killed on the spot ; and while the Duke was over him, Mohun shortened his sword, stabbed him in at the shoulder to the heart. The Duke was helped toward the cakehouse by the ring in Hyde Park (where they fought), and died on the grass, before he could reach the house ; and was brought home in his coach by eight, while the poor duchess was asleep. Macartney and one Hamilton were the seconds, who fought likewise, and are both fled. I am told that a footman of Lord Mohun's stabbed Duke Hamilton, and some say Macartney did so too. Mohun gave the affront, and yet sent the challenge.

One could fill a book with the stories of real duels, and another book with stories of imaginary duels that have taken place in Hyde Park. Captain Booth, the husband of Fielding's Amelia, was walking in St. James's Park when he met Colonel Bath, with some other officers, and being insulted by the Colonel, Booth said if they were not in St. James's, near the palace, where duels were forbidden, he would know what to do. The Colonel was willing to oblige him, so they strutted wrathfully up Constitution Hill to Hyde Park, till they came, says Fielding, " to that place which may be properly called the

field of blood, being that part a little to the left of the ring, which heroes have chosen for their exit out of this world." Here the Colonel threw his wig and coat on the grass ; both drew their swords ; and, after a few furious passes, Booth ran him through the body, and, as he lay on the ground, a few words of explanation made it clear that he had insulted Booth under a misapprehension ; so they shook hands and were reconciled and, the Colonel's injury being slight, Booth ran to Grosvenor Gate to fetch a chair to have him carried home.

5

Another duel - a real one - was fought there by that witty, disreputable Member of Parliament and champion of Liberty, John Wilkes, and Samuel Martin, M.P., Secretary to the Treasury, and this duel survives in literature because it moved Charles Churchill, the satirist, to write his long poem, *The Duellist*. Wilkes was living in Great George Street, Westminster, and editing the *North Briton*, in which he mercilessly scarified his opponents till the paper was suppressed for publishing a seditious libel. In one number of his paper (in 1763) Wilkes sketched Martin's character, and it was

not a nice sketch ; later, without naming Martin, he spoke of " the most treacherous, base, selfish, mean, abject, low-lived and dirty fellow that ever wriggled himself into a secretaryship." Martin seems to have recognised the portrait, and, standing up in the House of Commons, looked across at Wilkes, during a debate on proceedings to be taken against the *North Briton*, and remarked that the author of that paper was " a malignant, infamous scoundrel who had stabbed him in the dark." When they talk of the decay of manners in the House of Commons I like to remember these and worse things that happened there in the good old days. As soon as he got home that evening, Wilkes wrote to Martin suggesting that, though he had been stabbed, it was evidently not in the dark, but to cut off all pretence of ignorance, wrote Wilkes, " I whisper in your ear that every passage in the *North Briton* in which you have been named or even alluded to was written by your humble servant." Martin at once replied, repeating that Wilkes was a malignant and infamous scoundrel, and saying, " I desire that you meet me in Hyde Park immediately with a brace of pistols each, to determine our difference. I shall go to the ring in Hyde Park with my pistols so concealed that nobody may see them,

and I will wait in expectation of you one hour. As I shall call on my way at your house to deliver this letter, I propose to go from thence directly to the ring in Hyde Park, and I mention that I shall wait an hour in order to give you full time to meet me." He was not kept waiting, for Wilkes was no coward. They met in Hyde Park, and after Wilkes had fired twice and missed, Martin's second shot wounded Wilkes seriously in the stomach. Martin wanted to assist him, but Wilkes, believing he was mortally wounded, insisted on Martin making his escape before news of what had happened got about and the police came to arrest him. Martin seems to have acted on this advice, and presently some people who found Wilkes lying there carried him home. He not only refused to give any information, but returned Martin's letter to him so that there should be no evidence against him. Wilkes was a Republican, the hero of the mob, and the people of London were furious at what had happened to their champion, and it would have fared badly with Martin if he had fallen into their hands, for the odd thing was that though Wilkes was cross-eyed, sometimes irritably self-assertive, lived loosely in a halo of scandal, he had certain courageous and generous qualities that made him a curiously attractive

personality, so that even Dr. Johnson, who disliked him intensely on hearsay, succumbed to his charm when he met him. You may read in Walpole's *Letters* how, when Wilkes was a candidate for Parliament, his supporters swarmed about the streets, wearing his colours, shouting for Wilkes and Liberty, stopping passers-by and handling them roughly if they refused to wear his colours or shout for him with them. He always stood up strenuously for the liberties of the people, and was always in trouble with the authorities, for his writings in the *North Briton*, or for his daringly outspoken speeches in Parliament, where he once flatly accused George III of uttering a falsehood in his speech from the throne. More riotous mobs, I suppose, gathered in London to support him in his divers troubles than ever gathered before or since on behalf of any one man. Yet he held his ground and was made Lord Mayor in 1774, and served the city well, and in general deserved a good deal of the eulogy that Churchill pronounced upon him in his *Epistle to William Hogarth*. But the chief object of that epistle was, while paying high tribute to the genius of Hogarth, to denounce him with vitriolic contempt for drawing and publishing a grotesque caricature of Wilkes, horribly cross-eyed and

holding a pole with a cap of liberty on the top of it.

6

Churchill was one of the most topical of satirists, and through most of his satires he scatters references to events of the day and contemporary characters. He was born in Vine Street, Westminster, was much at the taverns and coffee-houses, and mixed in the theatrical and Bohemian literary life of his generation. In *The Ghost*, with numerous divergencies into other subjects, he tells the story of the famous Cock Lane ghost which was the talk of London for over a year. In 1759, William Kent and his wife, of Norfolk, went to lodge with a Mr. Parsons, the clerk of the parish, at Cock Lane, Smithfield. While Kent was away in the country on business, his wife had Parsons's eleven-year-old daughter to sleep with her, and was much disturbed in the night by curious scratchings and knockings. Mrs. Parsons was puzzled by these noises, but suggested that the knockings were perhaps those of a neighbouring shoemaker working late. When Mr. Kent returned, he had Parsons arrested for £20 he had lent him, which Parsons could not or would not

repay, and, this making things unpleasant, Kent and his wife removed to another house in the same street. Next week, Mrs. Kent was taken ill and died of smallpox, and she was buried in St. John's Church, Clerkenwell. Parsons, now out of prison, spread a report that the spirit which had disturbed Mrs. Kent and his daughter had now been succeeded by the ghost of Mrs. Kent, who started knocking as soon as his daughter was in bed. He said that a code of knocks had been arranged with the ghost, and in answer to questions she had said that her husband murdered her by putting arsenic in the drink he gave her during her illness. Many people, persons of rank and fashion among them, went to the house in Cock Lane at night, sat in the girl's bedroom, heard the knockings, and heard them spell out these charges against Kent. The spirit undertook to attend one of the gentlemen present, on one such occasion, and go with him into the vault under St. John's Church, Clerkenwell, where Mrs. Kent was buried, and as a token of her presence to knock upon the coffin. Kent was indignant at all this. Hearing of what was happening, he went with a party to the church, at one in the morning, and the gentleman went down into the vault and stood by the coffin, but no sound was heard.

Investigations continued, and Dr. Johnson was one of several who went one night and sat in the girl's bedroom and heard the knockings, and could find no reason to doubt they were genuine, though they suspected that the girl caused the noises in ways they could not detect. By and by, when the girl was threatened with punishment if she did not confess that the whole thing was a fraud, she insisted that it was genuine, and, having failed to produce any sounds for a night or two, promised that the ghost should communicate next night. It did so, but the girl was found to be hiding a small board under her stays and had apparently been producing the knocks and scratches with the assistance of this. But she had been searched on former occasions and no such contrivance was found. However, Kent could endure no more of it, he started legal proceedings against Parsons, his wife, and daughter ; against the Rev. Mr. Moore, minister of St. Sepulchre, near Smithfield, who had been spreading the slanders concerning him ; and against one Mr. James, a reputable tradesman. The case was tried at the Guildhall, and Lord Mansfield and the jury convicted these people of a conspiracy against the life and character of Mr. Kent. Sentence was deferred to give the prisoners a chance of mitigating their offence by

making some pecuniary compensation to Kent, and the clergyman and Mr. James, the tradesman, purchased their pardon by paying Kent six hundred pounds and the court six and eight-pence each by way of fine. Parsons was sentenced to be put in the pillory at the end of Cock Lane, and then to be imprisoned for two years ; his wife went to prison for one year ; and a luckless Mr. Brown of Amen Corner was fined fifty pounds for writing and publishing letters on the subject. When Parsons appeared in the pillory in Smithfield, at the end of his own lane, he was so evidently out of his mind that, it is said, the populace considered him so much an object of compassion that, instead of pelting and otherwise using him ill, they made a handsome collection for him. If all that had happened a couple of centuries earlier, the jury were more likely to have believed in the ghost than in those who declared it was a fraud ; but the eighteenth century was a sceptical age, more sceptical perhaps than our own, for the belief in spirits has come back to us, and there are spiritualists to-day who are convinced that the Cock Lane ghost was a real ghost, and certainly it remains with so much mystery about it that there is perhaps as much excuse for believing as for disbelieving in it.



COCK LANE—GILTSPUR STREET

THESE OLD HOUSES, STILL STANDING, FACED THE
"GHOST HOUSE," DEMOLISHED MANY YEARS AGO

But I have wandered down into the reign of George III, and want to go back for a few minutes to George II and Pope. Not to the graceful and exquisite idea he gives you of certain aspects of the life of the fine lady of the period in *The Rape of the Lock*, but to his cruelly satirical panorama of the poor authors of Grub Street in *The Dunciad*. Grub Street now is used as a general term indicating the whole class of unsuccessful and poverty-stricken authors, wherever they may dwell. Pope gave it much the same wide meaning, but when he wrote, there was a real Grub Street largely inhabited by those literary outcasts. It ran from Fore Street to Chiswell Street, and is still there, but we have disguised it with the more dignified name of Milton Street. Its dirty, dismal old haunted houses have gone from it with its old name, and it is nowadays a busy place of warehouses, offices, factories, but when George II was King it was the home of many of those literary drudges of whom Pope and Swift, from the height of their prosperity, wrote with such pitiless contempt. True, some of them attacked Pope first, and, for all his greatness, "the wicked asp of Twickenham," as Lady Wortley Montague called him,

was not big enough nor magnanimous enough to pass them by in silence when they snapped at him. Some of them were men of learning ; some with a streak of genius ; they translated and edited Greek and Latin classics competently, and among them were the authors of many of the fairy-tales and nursery rhymes that are still popular. And there is a typical tale of the street that indicates what penury prevailed there - a tale of two poor scholars who shared a wretched attic and had a single suit of clothes between them that they took it in turns to wear ; one sitting in bed at work with a blanket round him whilst the other walked abroad respectable and called upon the publishers. And it is miserable creatures such as these that Pope has pilloried for ever in *The Dunciad*. Pope first of all made Lewis Theobald the hero of *The Dunciad*, and crowned him King of Dullness, and his only reason for this was that Theobald had edited an edition of Shakespeare which was vastly superior to and more successful than an edition Pope himself had edited. Theobald was a sound, painstaking scholar, and many lines and passages in Shakespeare were mere nonsense, and were so passed by Pope for his edition, until Theobald, with an almost uncanny instinct, corrected them and restored them to what one feels they must have

been when Shakespeare wrote them. To give one instance—the lines in which Mistress Quickly described the death of Falstaff in *Henry V* used to run : “ His nose was as sharp as a pen and a table of green fields,” but Theobald caught at the right meaning and made it, “ His nose was as sharp as a pen and a’ babbled of green fields,” which gives it not only meaning but pathos with the suggestion that the genial old rogue’s mind was rambling far away from the Eastcheap tavern in his last hours. The text of Shakespeare will always be indebted to Theobald for several such corrections as this. In a second edition of *The Dunciad*, for some reason, Pope dropped Theobald out and put in his place Colley Cibber ; but though Cibber was one of the worst of poets, he wrote clever and lively comedies, and was such a witty and whimsical old sinner that to enthrone him as King of Dullness was an absurdity, and, so far from being hurt or resentful, Cibber addressed a breezy letter to Pope in which he said, “ I wrote more to be fed than to be famous ; and since my writings still give me a dinner, do you rhyme me out of my stomach if you can ! ” and he capped this with an anecdote of a creeping little ensign who for a trifling fault struck an honest, lusty grenadier and started laying on him furiously with his

cane, but the big grenadier merely folded his arms, and shook his head, and begged his valiant officer, "Have a care, dear captain, don't strike so hard. Upon my soul, you'll hurt yourself." Pope left Cibber in *The Dunciad*, but he does not belong there. His *Apology for my Life* is one of the most entertaining of autobiographies and full of the life and spirit of the London in which he was a popular actor and dramatist, and if you go to see that wonderful painted bust of Cibber in the National Portrait Gallery (the most life-like thing in busts that is known to me) you will guess he was a leering, sprightly, droll, wicked old man, but never a dull one. So you may take it that *The Dunciad* is not so truthful in its judgments as it is brilliantly and mordantly satirical.

8

Dr. Johnson and Goldsmith never lived in the actual Grub Street, but they lived Grub Street lives for many years after they first came to London. Johnson walked the streets at night with Richard Savage, hungry and homeless; when he had a trifle, he was glad to wolf a meal of potatoes in a cellar. He and Goldsmith toiled as booksellers' (or publishers') hacks, and you

may know what that meant by the bitter epitaph Goldsmith wrote for one of the tribe :

Here lies poor Ned Purdon, from misery freed,
He once was a bookseller's hack ;
He led such a damnable life in this world,
I don't think he'll wish to come back.

Johnson laments that the author's lot is "toil, envy, want, the patron, and the jail," and he was well acquainted with all but the last of these. When he was working on his great Dictionary, he wanted Lord Chesterfield to help him by being his patron and accepting the dedication of the book. He says he waited again and again in Chesterfield's ante-room, but his lordship was too busy to see him, and when he wrote he received no answer. Then when the Dictionary was nearly finished and its importance being talked of in literary circles, Chesterfield wrote offering to patronise the project, and Johnson's reply, saying his lordship was too late, that he had struggled through without a patron and now needed none, is a rebuke as poignant as it was dignified, and was the death-blow of that system which had for years almost compelled a poor author to find a noble patron for his book before he could get it published. By the way, there is one line in Johnson's

satire, *London*, which may seem extravagant, but you can't read contemporary records without recognising that there is anyhow a grain of grim truth in it. He says,

Scarce can our fields (such crowds at Tyburn die)
With hemp the gallows and the fleet supply.

Fielding's ironical novel, *Jonathan Wild*, some of Defoe's novels, and innumerable ballads and broadsheets will show you what a large part Tyburn played in eighteenth-century life ; what a common thing it was to see the cart with the criminal and his coffin in it going in procession all up Holborn and Oxford Street to that place of the gallows facing Hyde Park near the corner of Edgware Road. And I have lately had lent to me a MS. diary in which the diarist has copied interesting items from a newspaper published from 1732 to 1770, and in this, among notes about the press-gang breaking into business premises in Whitefriars Street and trying to carry off recruits for the Navy ; visits to London shows of giants and dwarfs, who had been received by the King at Buckingham House ; and two or three reports of Dick Turpin being nearly captured ; there are records of criminals hanged at Tyburn by the half-dozen, and on one occasion as many as twenty-three at a time,

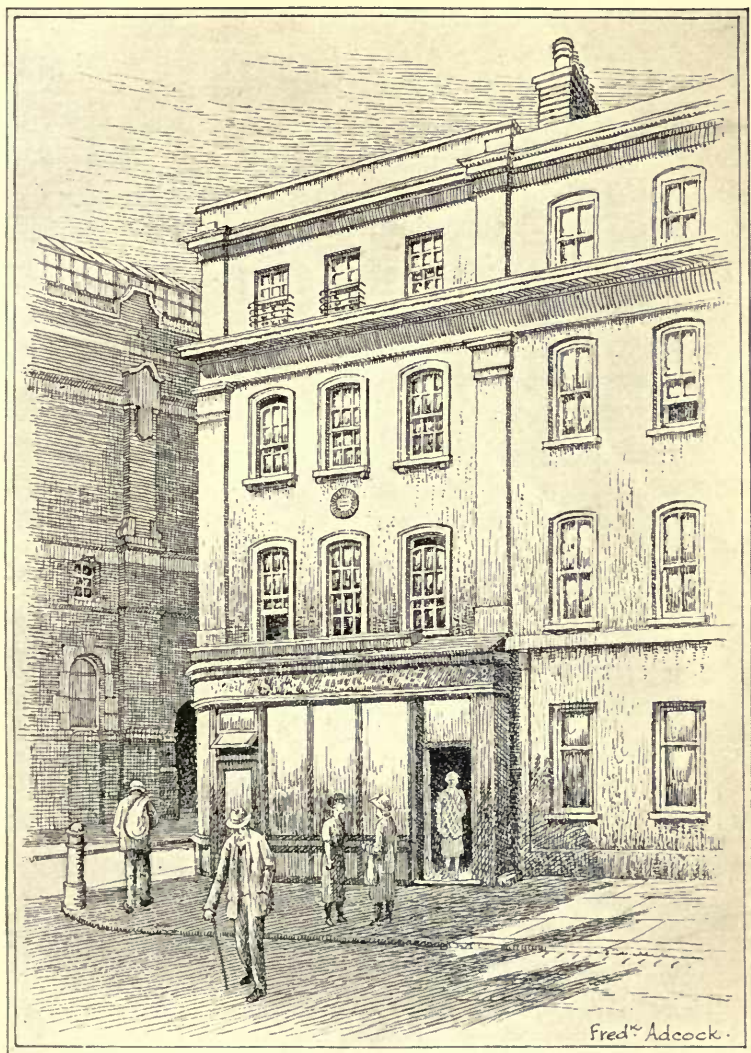
which implies a considerable consumption of hemp. There are dreadful accounts, too, of men and women dragged to Tyburn on hurdles and there burned for forgery. So you realise that those were not dainty "teacup times of hood and hoop" for everybody.

Only one of the many homes Dr. Johnson had in London still survives, and that is the house in Gough Square, at the back of Fleet Street. It is strange to go there now, through the rooms that once held the sound of his voice, and of the voices of Goldsmith, Reynolds, Boswell, and other of his friends. In the long, low top room he and his assistants worked on the great Dictionary, and I like to remember as I come out at the old front door that one day he came out there and met on the steps his messenger, who was returning from delivering the last of the Dictionary to the publisher. Johnson had taxed that poor publisher rather heavily; he had delayed considerably with the work, had worried him with many corrections in his proofs, and exhausted his patience in many ways. Johnson was thankful to have the job off his hands, and thought the publisher too might have felt and expressed some gratitude. "Well," he said to his messenger, "you delivered it all right? Did he say anything?"

“Yes, sir,” answered the messenger, “all he said was ‘Thank God, I’ve done with him.’” Johnson reflected and smiled grimly, and said, “Well, I am glad he thanks God for anything.”

Just as Dr. Johnson is all about London—he lived at sixteen different addresses there, six of them in Fleet Street by-ways—Charles Lamb, born in Crown Office Row, in the Temple, and the best-loved Londoner of them all, haunts the London of the generation that followed Johnson’s. But to tell of the large place Dr. Johnson and his friends occupied in the life of their time; or to tell that wonderful story of Lamb and his sister, of the hospitable gatherings of famous men at their rooms in the Temple, in Russell Street, Covent Garden, or at that quaint house in Colebrook Row, Islington, which is still standing, would each need a book to itself.

There is the tragedy, too, of Chatterton, “the marvellous boy who perished in his pride,” broken by disappointments and starvation and dying by his own hand at eighteen, in that garret up Brooke Street, Holborn. We get pictures of the life and character of the eighteenth century in the literature of the eighteenth century; wonderful sketches of London low life in Defoe’s *Colonel Jack* and *Moll Flanders*



WILLIAM BLAKE'S BIRTHPLACE—
28 BROAD STREET, SOHO

and Fielding's *Jonathan Wild*; of the middle-class and high life in Richardson's novels, and in Fanny Burney's *Evelina* and in her diaries. She takes you to those Vauxhall Gardens commemorated in the name of Vauxhall station, and to the Pantheon, the very fashionable dancing and assembly hall in Oxford Street, where there is still a Pantheon on the same spot, but it is now occupied by a bottled-beer merchant. Then there are those pictures of the literary and general life of London in Boswell's *Johnson* and in Mrs. Piozzi's *Anecdotes*; in Johnson's *Rambler* and *Idler*, and some of Goldsmith's essays.

And one ought not to forget the Gordon Riots, which had all London in a ferment in 1780, when the rioters were burning Newgate, swarming all about Cheapside and Holborn — but for the vividest record of these you can go to Dickens's *Barnaby Rudge*, as for other pictures of high and low life in eighteenth-century London you may go to two of the best of Besant's novels, *The Orange Girl* and *No Other Way*, and, of course, to Dickens's *Tale of Two Cities*. But the list of such novels, to say nothing of plays and poems, is endless.

There are Scott, Southey, Wordsworth, and their London associations, but these went on

into the next century, so I leave them at present, and for the sake of contrasting the end of the eighteenth century with its beginning will limit myself to a brief glance at William Blake in eighteenth-century London, though he too survived the century by twenty-seven years.

He was born over his father's hosiery shop at 28 Broad Street, Soho, and it was there that the first of his strange visions came to him; for when he was four years old he started screaming one day, and told his alarmed mother that he had seen the face of God at the window looking in upon him. When he was eight or nine, he used to go alone on rambles into the country, and on Peckham Rye other visions came to him. He once saw a tree there "filled with angels, bright angelic wings bespangling every bough like stars"; again, one summer morning, he saw "the haymakers at work, and amid them angelic figures walking." At ten he was taking drawing lessons at Mr. Paris's Academy in the Strand; he was already writing poetry. He married in 1782 and made his home at 23 Green Street, Leicester Square, and began to move in literary society. Flaxman, the sculptor, had become his friend, and introduced him to Mrs. Mathew, who invited him to her salon at 27 Rathbone Place.

His wife believed in him and had the simplest faith in all his visions. When he lived at 17 South Moulton Street, Moses, Julius Cæsar, the Builder of the Pyramids, and other such famous persons of antiquity were among his visitants. It is not easy to realise that this burning, fiery spirit did live in these Moulton Street rooms, surrounded by his terrific imaginings, and could pass out of that street and leave it so drab, decorous, ordinary, commonplace as it is to-day. In 1800 Blake went out of London to live for a while in a cottage at Felpham, near Bognor, and there too his visions came to him. At that date, Flaxman had a house at 17 Buckingham Street, Euston Road, an insignificant, rather mean-looking house, which looks more so than ever now its neighbourhood has degenerated—a pinched, grimy, dreary old house it is, but when you remember that one day at the end of September, 1800, the postman knocked at this small door and delivered here the following letter from Blake to Flaxman, the house is transfigured and seems to belong more to dreamland than to the solid streets of London.

Dear Sculptor of Eternity [wrote Blake], — We are safe arrived at our cottage, which is more beautiful

than I thought it, and more convenient. . . . I have begun to work. Felpham is a sweet place for study, because it is more spiritual than London. Heaven opens here on all sides her golden gates ; her windows are not obstructed by vapours ; voices of celestial inhabitants are more distinctly heard, and their forms more distinctly seen ; and my cottage is also a shadow of their houses. . . . And now begins a new life, because another covering of earth is shaken off. I am more famed in heaven for my works than I could well conceive. In my brain are studies and chambers filled with books and pictures of old, which I wrote and painted in ages of eternity before my mortal life ; and these works are the delight and study of archangels. Why then should I be anxious about the riches and fame of mortality ? The Lord, our Father, will do for us and with us according to His divine will, and for our good. You, O dear Flaxman, are a sublime archangel – my friend and companion from eternity. In the divine bosom is our dwelling-place. I look back into the regions of reminiscence and behold our ancient days before this earth appeared in its vegetable mortality to my mortal eyes. I see our houses of eternity, which can never be separated, though our mortal vehicles should stand at the remotest corners of heaven from each other. Farewell, my best friend. Remember me and my wife in love and friendship to our dear Mrs. Flaxman, whom we ardently desire to entertain beneath our thatched roof of rusted gold.

I have seen that thatched roof of rusted gold

at Felpham, where this letter was written, and that dingy house off the Euston Road where it was received, and have had a fancy that if walls had more than ears and that cottage and this house could sometimes remember what they have known, the remembrance would set all their windows glowing. Later, when they quarrelled, Flaxman said that Blake was mad, and Blake, instead of thinking Flaxman an archangel, called him a blockhead. Plenty of others, then and since, have said that Blake was mad, and no doubt compared with the narrow sanity, the rather unimaginative, calmly intellectual outlook of Addison, Pope, and others of their kind at the beginning of the century, Blake was as mad as a hatter. But everything depends on your standard of sanity. If the magical things that are in his "Jerusalem," if some of those inimitably simple and beautiful "Songs of Innocence" and "Songs of Experience," are the work of a madman, it is to be regretted that some of our twentieth-century poets do not discover Blake's recipe for madness and go off their heads in the same way and to the same good purpose.

I

You get a feeling, somehow, that life in London, and in general, changed quite suddenly as soon as the twentieth century came in ; that the Victorian age was scarcely over before it became at once old-fashioned, and we began to go ahead in a great hurry. That was not the usual way of things. The nineteenth century grew out of the eighteenth by slow degrees, and contentedly brought a good many eighteenth-century manners and customs with it. In the early years of the nineteenth century, a close friend of Charles Lamb's, John Rickman, was secretary to the Speaker of the House of Commons, and lived in Palace Yard, Westminster. His daughter, Ann, who was born in 1808, occupied part of her old age in writing her *Recollections*, which I believe have not been published, but extracts from them are in Constance Hill's book, *Good Company in Old Westminster and the Temple*. These give you interesting glimpses not only of Lamb and his sister and their friends, but of the London of

the period. The Lord Mayor's procession, in those days, still followed its ancient practice and went to the Law Courts, which were then at Westminster, on the Thames, and about 1818, when Ann Rickman was still known as little Ann, she saw one of those processions and has made a note of it. She was one of a party of children who witnessed it from the house of Rickman's neighbour, Mrs. Wilde, whose windows overlooked the river. "The new Lord Mayor," writes Ann, "came from Temple Bar Water gate in his gold Barge, rowed by at least twenty men in scarlet and gold with red oars. The cabin end of the Barge, like a Gondola, had windows with gilded frames, through which was visible a grand cold collation, a forest of flags on the top, surrounding the citizens, Aldermen and others in their furred robes. A band of music attended in a lesser barge, and there were five or six others belonging to the various city companies. The Fishmongers' Company, I remember, had a grand gold Dolphin at the prow. The barges waited about for an hour or two whilst the Mayor and his retinue were at the Exchequer taking their oaths of allegiance. Sprats was the orthodox old-fashioned refreshment and before starting from the city, mutton broth,

etc., had been the sustainer for the passage by water." So you see the Lord Mayor and Aldermen still lived up to their reputation of feeding well. They had mutton broth, etc., before starting, took a cold collation on board with them, had sprats after they had been sworn in at Westminster, and Ann adds, "The Lord Mayor's feast at Guildhall concluded this day of many meals."

Ann tells you that she and her family went every Sunday morning to St. Margaret's Church, by the Abbey; and when they were out for amusement went to Vauxhall Gardens, whose day of fashion was nearly over, or across the water to Astley's, which still survived there as a Circus when I was young. She tells you how from her window she saw George IV's Queen Caroline go to her trial in the House of Lords when the King was anxious to divorce her in 1820; and she quotes from a letter from her sister, for Ann was away on holiday at the time, a full and vivid account of the terrible fire which completely destroyed the old House of Commons and the old House of Lords in 1834. But perhaps we could find the best and longest links between Georgian and Victorian London in the books of that born Londoner who, as Benjamin Disraeli, published his first novel under George

IV, and as Lord Beaconsfield published his last when Victoria had been for more than forty years on the throne. But instead of trying to join up my periods exactly and formally, I propose to fill the years between the beginning of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the Victorian era with a few of London's literary associations of a more miscellaneous kind. One of these that makes Oxford Street a more romantic place than it looks is the story of how De Quincey ran away from Manchester Grammar School in 1802, when he was seventeen, wandered into Wales, and finally found his way to London, where for two months he was homeless and seldom slept under a roof, and for sixteen weeks suffered hunger in various degrees of intensity. But for the compassion of that innocent outcast, Mother Ann, he would certainly have died.

2

A few years later, Shelley, having been expelled from Oxford, arrived in Soho and took lodgings at 15 Poland Street, and here, as his father refused to help him, his sisters secretly sent him their pocket-money by the hand of their schoolfellow, Harriett Westbrook. Shelley

fell desperately in love with Harriett, and, after his father had relented and settled two hundred a year on him, he arranged to elope with her. They were married in Edinburgh, and presently returned to London, where they lived for a while with Mr. Westbrook, in Chapel Street, then at Cook's Hotel, in Albemarle Street. But Shelley had wearied of his romance within three years, and given his heart to Mary Godwin, the daughter of Lamb's friend, the philosopher and novelist, William Godwin; and when he and Mary Godwin ran away together, the unhappy Harriett put an end to her troubles by drowning herself in the Serpentine, in Hyde Park.

Somewhere in those same early years of the century Wordsworth was paying his occasional visits to London, which he loved almost as little as Lamb loved the country, but it moved him to write one of the finest of his sonnets - that composed on Westminster Bridge on the 3rd September, 1803 - which begins :

Earth has not anything to show more fair !
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty :
This city now doth like a garment wear
The beauty of the morning. . . .

With " The Reverie of Poor Susan " you have

Wordsworth in the very heart of London, and if his little sketch of the country girl exiled in town, and, as she hurries through the street on her way to work, seeing a vision of her far-off cottage home, is not great poetry, it has a charm of simple naturalness that keeps it in one's memory :

At the corner of Wood Street, when daylight appears,
There's a thrush that sings loud – it has sung for
three years :

Poor Susan has passed by the spot and has heard
In the silence of morning the song of the bird.

'Tis a note of enchantment. What ails her? She sees
A mountain ascending, a vision of trees ;
Bright volumes of vapour through Lothbury glide,
And a river flows on through the vale of Cheapside. . . .

Wordsworth's topography is doubtful ; Lothbury does not open into Cheapside, and Susan could have caught no glimpse of it from anywhere about Wood Street. But at the corner of Wood Street there is still the same quaint, squat shop that was there in Wordsworth's day, and the same gloriously green old tree, growing in the patch of ground behind the shop, still towers high above its roof and gives that part of Cheapside an air of Arcadia.

One other memory of Wordsworth in London takes you to Smithfield, where he seems to have gone to see that Bartholomew Fair which had been held there once a year for seven centuries. It is not easy to picture him, an aloof, curiously alien figure, straying about among its stalls and booths and puppet-shows and indescribable pandemonium, jostled in all that riot and then going home to the quiet of his Westmorland hills, to put his recollections of it all into that portion of his long, unfinished "Prelude" which touches on his residence in London :

What anarchy and din
 Barbarian and informal, a phantasma
 Monstrous in colour, motion, shape, size, sound !
 Below, the open space, through every nook
 Of the wide area, twinkles, is alive
 With heads ; the midway region, and above
 Is thronged with staring pictures and huge scrolls,
 Dumb proclamations of the Prodigies ;
 With chattering monkeys dangling from their poles,
 And children whirling in their roundabouts. . . .
 The Stone-eater, the Man that swallows Fire,
 Giants, ventriloquists, the Invisible Girl,
 The Bust that speaks and moves its goggling eyes,
 The Waxwork, Clockwork, all the marvellous craft
 Of modern Merlins, Wild Beasts, Puppet Shows. . . .

I would like to have seen Wordsworth mooning

about Smithfield and the lanes and alleys of Bartholomew Close among all that noise and jolly nonsense of the Fair ; and it was like the severely businesslike mid-Victorians to find it a nuisance and suppress it once for all, and all its ancient follies, in 1855.

3

But twenty years or more before the Fair was abolished, just at the corner of Giltspur Street, stood the chemist's shop at which the hero of Captain Marryat's *Japhet in Search of a Father* served his apprenticeship. One side of Giltspur Street connects up with Bartholomew Hospital ; the other side ends at a corner, where the irregular square of Smithfield begins to fall away from it ; and here, as Japhet Newland himself tells you, was the home he was sent to from the Foundling Hospital.

"The practitioner who thus took me by the hand," says Japhet, "was a Mr. Phineas Cophagus, whose house was most conveniently situated for business, one side of the shop looking upon Smithfield Market, the other presenting a surface of glass to the principal street leading out of the same market. It was a corner house, but not *in* a corner. On each side of the

shop were two gin establishments, and next to *them* were two public-houses, and then two eating-houses frequented by graziers, butchers and drovers. Did the men drink so much as to quarrel in their cups, who was so handy to plaster up the broken heads as Mr. Cophagus? Did a fat grazier eat himself into an apoplexy, how very convenient was the ready lancet of Mr. Cophagus. Did a bull gore a man, Mr. Cophagus appeared with his . . . lint. Did an ox frighten a lady, it was in the back parlour that she recovered. . . . Market days were a sure market to my master; and if an overdriven beast knocked down others, it only helped to set him on his legs."

We have seen in earlier ages what a large part Smithfield has played in the literature and in the real life of London. It has many early and late Victorian literary associations also. If you know your *Oliver Twist*, you will remember how into Smithfield, from St. John Street Road, came Noah Claypole and his Charlotte, a weedy, disreputable pair, Charlotte carrying their bundle, and as they were going to that doubtful hostelry, The Three Cripples, in Field Lane, where they were to fall into the hands of Fagin, the thief-trainer, you may take it that they turned off along Charterhouse Lane, now Charterhouse

Street, out of which Field Lane opened, just beyond Farringdon Street. And into Smithfield on the cheerless morning when they set out for Chertsey, where *Oliver Twist* was forced to take part in that notorious burglary, came Bill Sikes holding the timorous, reluctant little Oliver by the hand ; and incidentally Dickens gives you a graphic picture of Smithfield as it was in 1830, when *Oliver Twist* was written. Sikes was bringing Oliver from his own lodging out in a slummy by-way of Bishopsgate Without.

Turning down Sun Street and Crown Street [writes Dickens], and crossing Finsbury Square, Mr. Sikes struck by way of Chiswell Street, into Barbican ; thence into Long Lane ; and so into Smithfield ; from which latter place rose a tumult of discordant sounds that filled Oliver with surprise and amazement. It was market morning. The ground was covered nearly ankle-deep with filth and mire ; and a thick steam, perpetually rising from the reeking bodies of the cattle and mingling with the fog, which seemed to rest upon the chimney-tops, hung heavily above. All the pens in the centre of the large area, and as many temporary ones as could be crowded into the vacant space, were filled with sheep ; tied up to posts by the gutter side were long lines of beasts and oxen, three or four deep. Countrymen, butchers, drovers, hawkers, boys, thieves, idlers, and vagabonds

of every low grade, were mingled together in a dense mass ; the whistling of drovers, the barking of dogs, the bellowing and plunging of oxen, the bleating of sheep, the grunting and squeaking of pigs ; the cries of hawkers, the shouts, oaths and quarrelling on all sides ; the ringing of bells, and roar of voices that issued from every public house ; the crowding, pushing, driving, beating, whooping and yelling ; the hideous and discordant din that resounded from every corner of the market ; and the unwashed, unshaven, squalid and dirty figures constantly running to and fro and bursting in and out of the throng, rendered it a stunning and bewildering scene which quite confounded the senses. Mr. Sikes, dragging Oliver after him, elbowed his way through the thickest of the crowd and bestowed very little attention on the numerous sights and sounds which so astonished the boy. He nodded once or twice to a passing friend ; and resisting as many invitations to take a morning dram, pressed steadily onward, until they were clear of the turmoil and had made their way through Hosier Lane into Holborn.

That was before Holborn Viaduct was built, when Farringdon Street ran in a valley and, as you may learn in some of Dickens's stories, the coaches had to go down a steep hill from Newgate Street and up a steep hill on the other side into Holborn.

Quitting Smithfield by Hosier Lane, before they got to Holborn, Sikes and Oliver would

pass the Saracen's Head, on Snow Hill, and in his next novel Dickens had Mr. Squeers lodging at the Saracen's Head, the site of which is now duly marked there; and when Squeers and Nicholas Nickleby set out together from that inn for Dotheboys Hall in Yorkshire, the coach that carried them rattled in over the stones of Smithfield on its way to the north. In a later novel, *Great Expectations*, Dickens was back in Smithfield again. On his arrival in London, Pip went to call on Mr. Jaggers, whose office was in Little Britain, close by Smithfield, but Mr. Jaggers was out when he got there, and his clerk advised Pip to take a walk and see the sights - "He told me," says Pip, "to go round the corner and I should come into Smithfield. So I came into Smithfield; and the shameful place being all asmeared with filth and fat and blood and foam seemed to stick to me. So I rubbed it off with all possible speed by turning into a street where I saw the great black dome of St. Paul's bulging at me from behind a grim stone building which a bystander said was Newgate Prison." Smithfield is no longer the dirty, littered, noisome spot it was when Pip knew it; its whole traffic nowadays is in dead meat, which is sold with noise enough but in cleanly and orderly fashion within the vast market

building which is one of the improvements the later Victorian age may place to its credit.

Thackeray, too, must have known Smithfield pretty well, for he passed his boyhood in the Charterhouse School in the Charterhouse, which still stands on the edge of the market, though the school is removed into the country. In *The Adventures of Philip*, Thackeray puts Philip into the same school, and tells how Philip's mother promised to go and see him there every Saturday, but failed to keep her promise. "Smithfield is a long way from Piccadilly," he says, "and an angry cow once scratched the panels of her carriage, causing her footman to spring from his board into a pig-pen, and herself to feel such a shock that no wonder she was afraid of visiting the city afterwards." And in *The Newcomes*, stately old Colonel Newcome, says Thackeray, "dismissed his cab at Ludgate Hill and walked thence by the dismal precincts of Newgate, and across the muddy pavement of Smithfield, on his way back to the old school where his son was, a way which he had trodden many a time in his own early days."

But let us get away from Smithfield, and go back for a few minutes to about 1826, when Charles Lamb was still living at Colebrook Cottage, Colebrook Row, Islington, and Thomas Hood had settled down with his family at 2 Robert Street, Adelphi. They were both good cockneys - Hood born in the Poultry, Cheapside; Lamb in the Temple, at Crown Office Row. Lamb was then turned fifty and at the height of his fame; Hood, still under thirty, struggling against ill health and poverty and beginning to make a reputation with his first book, the *Odes and Addresses to Great People*, and by his copious contributions to the magazines. He and Lamb were on the friendliest terms, and Mrs. Mary Balmanno, the friend of both, has left an interesting account of an evening she spent with the Hoods at 2 Robert Street, when Lamb and his sister and others were among the guests.

“In outward appearance,” she writes, “Hood conveyed the idea of a clergyman. His figure slight, and invariably dressed in black; his face pallid; the complexion delicate, and features regular; his countenance bespeaking

sympathy by its sweet expression of melancholy and suffering. Lamb was of a different mould and aspect. Of middle height, with brown and rather ruddy complexion, grey eyes expressive of sense and shrewdness, but neither large nor brilliant; his head and features well shaped, and the general expression of his countenance quiet, kind and observant, undergoing rapid changes in conversation, as did his manner, variable as an April day, particularly to his sister, whose saintlike good humour and patience were as remarkable as his strange and whimsical modes of trying them. But the brother and sister perfectly understood each other, and Charles, as she always called him, would not have been the Charles of her loving heart without the pranks and oddities which he was continually playing off on her, and which were only outnumbered by the instances of affection and evidences of ever-watchful solicitude with which he surrounded her." She goes on to describe Lamb as being in high spirits, sauntering about the room with his hands behind his back, talking by fits and starts with the guests who were best known to him. The evening concluded with a supper, at which Lamb elected to serve the lobster salad; and after supper, Mrs. Balmanno continues: "Mr. Hood

with inexpressible gravity in the upper part of his face, and his mouth twitching with smiles, sang his own comic song of ' If you go to France be sure you learn the lingo ' ; his pensive manner and feeble voice making it doubly ludicrous. Mr. Lamb, on being pressed to sing, excused himself in his own peculiar manner, but offered to pronounce a Latin eulogium instead. This was accepted, and he accordingly stammered forth a long stream of Latin words, among which as the name of Mrs. Hood frequently occurred, we ladies thought it in praise of her. The delivery of the speech occupied about five minutes. On inquiring of a gentleman who sat next me whether Mr. Lamb was praising Mrs. Hood, he informed me that was by no means the case, the eulogium being on the lobster salad."

In those days, within two minutes' walk of the scene of that merry gathering in Robert Street, Adelphi, a small boy, fretting under a sense of despair and humiliation, was toiling at sticking labels on bottles in Warren's blacking factory at Hungerford Bridge, by Charing Cross ; and within some twelve years from that time this forlorn small boy was to be an author more popular, more famous, more wealthy than either Lamb or Hood, for *Pickwick* was the

talk of the town and the country before Dickens was twenty-six. Lamb was dead then, but Hood became one of Dickens's friends, and he relates, in one of his letters, how, when he was living at 17 Elm Road, St. John's Wood, he went to Greenwich, to attend a dinner that was given to Dickens on his return from America. Hood was to have taken the chair, but excused himself on the ground of ill health, and Captain Marryat took his place. But Hood made a speech before the evening was over, and had a great reception, and he mentions with evident pleasure that he rode home from Greenwich in Dickens's carriage - for so far had Dickens risen in those few years from the poverty that sent him to drudge in that blacking factory. Getting out at 1 Devonshire Terrace, that still surviving house, in the Marylebone Road, where he was living, Dickens sent the carriage on into St. John's Wood to carry Hood to his own door.

It was a few years later that Hood wrote "The Song of the Shirt" and sent it to *Punch*, saying that three other papers had rejected it, and *Punch* promptly published the poem. It trebled the circulation of the paper, was reprinted in *The Times* and elsewhere, was sung about the streets, and brought Hood more

fame than anything else he had written. That, on the sweating of the poor seamstresses, was one of his London poems; "The Bridge of Sighs" was another; in a totally different vein, "Miss Kilmansegg and her Precious Leg" was another of his London poems, for her wild ride started in Hyde Park. But Hood was a born Londoner, and London enters much into his poetry. You may climb on to the top of St. Paul's and view London from that height as he viewed it in his "Moral Reflections on the Cross of St. Paul's":

The man that pays his pence and goes
 Up to thy lofty cross, St. Paul,
 Looks over London's naked nose,
 Women and men,
 The world is all beneath his ken,
 He sits above the Ball,
 He seems on Mount Olympus top,
 Among the gods, by Jupiter! and lets drop
 His eyes from the empyreal clouds
 On mortal crowds
 Seen from these skies
 How small those emmets in our eyes!
 Some carry little sticks - and one
 His eggs to warm them in the sun:
 Dear! what a hustle
 And bustle!

And there's my aunt. I know her by her waist,
 So long and thin,
 And so pinched in,
 Just in the pismire taste.

Oh, what are men? – Beings so small
 That should I fall
 Upon their little heads, I must
 Crush them by hundreds into dust!

5

St. Paul's had a very different visitor in Nathaniel Hawthorne, who came over from America and in one of his rambles about London says, "Seeing the door of St. Paul's, under one of the semi-circular porches, was partially open, I went in, and found that the afternoon service was about to be performed; so I remained to hear it, and to see what I could of the cathedral." At the close of the service, he strolled round looking at the monuments, and adds, "It is pleasant to stand in the centre of the cathedral and hear the noise of London, loudest all round this spot – how it is calmed into a sound as proper to be heard through the aisles as the sound of its own organ." The sight of the great dome soaring above London,

Afloat upon ethereal tides,

as John Davidson has it, made a deep impression on John Browdie, of *Nicholas Nickleby*, when he and Tilda viewed it from the top of the coach as they came riding into the city down St. Martin's Le Grand from the north ; it made a deep impression, too, on the negro, Gumbo, in Thackeray's *The Newcomes*, when he and young Clive Newcome saw it as they approached the city over London Bridge from the south. I like to think of Charlotte Brontë's shy, elusive figure going about the streets on the two or three visits she paid to London between 1847 and 1853. In her letters she mentions her visits to the Academy, the Zoological Gardens, the Crystal Palace, which had not been long opened when she came up in the fifties ; but the best picture she gives of her experiences here is in *Villette*, when, on her first visit to London, she was staying close to St. Paul's, at the Chapter Coffee House in Paternoster Row :

I had just extinguished my candle [she writes] and lain down when a deep, low mighty tone swung through the night. At first I knew it not ; but it was uttered twelve times, and at the twelfth colossal hum and trembling knell, I said, " I lie in the shadow of St. Paul's." The next day was the 1st March, and when I awoke, rose, and opened my curtain, I saw the risen

sun struggling through fog. Above my head, above the house-tops, co-elevate almost with the clouds, I saw a solemn, orbed mass, dark-blue and dim – the Dome. While I looked, my inner self moved ; my spirit shook its always fettered wings half loose ; I had a sudden feeling as if I, who never yet truly lived, were at last about to taste life. In that morning my soul grew as fast as Jonah's gourd. I like the spirit of this great London which I feel around me. Who but a coward would pass his whole life in hamlets, and for ever abandon his faculties to the eating rust of obscurity ? Prodigious was the amount of life I lived that morning. Finding myself before St. Paul's I went in ; I mounted to the dome ; I saw thence London, with its river, and its bridges and its churches : I saw antique Westminster, and the Green Temple Gardens, with sun upon them and a glad, blue sky of early spring above ; and between them and it, not too dense a cloud of haze. Descending, I went wandering whither chance might lead, in a still ecstasy of freedom and enjoyment ; and I got – I know not how – I got into the heart of city life. I saw and felt London at last : I got into the Strand ; I went up Cornhill ; I mixed with the life passing along ; I dared the peril of crossings. To do this, and to do it utterly alone, gave me, perhaps, an irrational, but a real pleasure. Since those days I have seen the West End, the parks, the fine squares ; but I love the City far better. The City seems so much more in earnest ; its business, its rush, its roar, are such serious things, sights and sounds. The City is getting its living – the West End but enjoying its pleasures.

At the West End you may be amused, but in the City you are deeply excited.

But if the City was earnest and busy about getting a living, that did not prevent romance from breaking into it occasionally, and it was in 1847, the year of Charlotte Brontë's first visit to London, that Disraeli was writing *Tancred*, and he sent Tancred into a gallant adventure on his first visit to the City :

It was just where the street is most crowded [you read], where it narrows, and losing the name of Cheapside, takes that of the Poultry, that the last of a series of stoppages occurred ; a stoppage which, at the end of ten minutes, lost its inert character of mere obstruction, and developed into the livelier qualities of the row. There were oaths, contradictions, menaces : " No you shan't. Yes I will. No I didn't. Yes you did. No you haven't. Yes you have " ; the lashing of a whip, the interference of a policeman, a crash, a scream. Tancred looked out of the window of his brougham. He saw a chariot in distress, a chariot such as would have become an Ondine by the waters of the Serpentine, and the very last sort of equipage to see smashed in the Poultry. It was really breaking a butterfly upon a wheel ; to crush its delicate springs, and crack its dark brown panels, soil its dainty hammercloth, and endanger the lives of its young coachman in a flaxen wig and its two tall footmen in short coats, worthy of Cinderella. [You don't see such coaches in Cheapside

now, except when the Lord Mayor is making a state procession.]

The scream, Disraeli goes on, came from a fair owner, a foreigner, who was surrounded by clamorous carmen and city marshals. Tancred let himself out of his brougham, found some ruthless officials persuading a beautiful woman to leave her carriage, the wheel of which was broken, and with great grace and gallantry begged her to make use of his carriage.

The lady, we are told, cast her beautiful eyes with an expression of astonishment she could not conceal, at the distinguished youth who thus suddenly appeared in the midst of insolent carmen, brutal policemen, and all the cynical amateurs of a mob. Public opinion in the Poultry was against her ; her coachman's wig had excited derision ; the footmen had given themselves airs. As for the lady, though at first awed by her beauty and magnificence, they rebelled against the authority of her manner. Besides, she was not alone. There was a gentleman with her, who wore moustaches, and had taken part in the proceedings at first by addressing the carmen in French.

“ You are too good,” said the lady, with a sweet expression.

Tancred opened the door of the chariot, the policeman pulled down the steps, the servants were told to do the best they could with the wrecked equipage ; in a second, the lady and her companion were in Tancred's brougham, who, desiring his servants to obey all their orders, disappeared, for the stoppage at this moment began to move, and there was no time for bandying compliments. Tancred had gained the pavement, and had made his way as far as the Mansion House, and began to inquire his way to the Bank.

For in a court close by the Bank lived the notable financier, Sidonia, whom Tancred was on his way to see.

That is very pretty romance for that busy, serious Cheapside which so impressed Charlotte Brontë.

6

And there is another romance that belongs to the Bank, and one that is said has some foundation in fact, though Thackeray tells it as fiction in his *Yellowplush Papers*. In his youth, Mr. Jeames Yellowplush there relates, he served as "tiger" to the elegant, fascinating Mr. Altamont, but was ignorant of his master's occupation. All he knew was that Mr. Altamont had

some business in the City, " for he went in every morning at ten, got out of his tilbry at the city end of City Road, and Jeames had to have it waiting at that spot for him at six in the evening, when, if it was summer, he spanked round into the Park and drove one of the neatest turnouts there." Yet Mr. Altamont lodged humbly with a Mr. and Mrs. Shum at Islington, and his servant, the youthful Yellowplush, "slep over the way, and only came in with his boots and brexfus of a morning." Altamont married his landlady's daughter, and they took a genteel house of their own, also in Islington. He always had plenty of money, but kept his trade or profession a secret from his wife and her family. One day, however, when Altamont had been drinking unwisely, he said something that roused his wife's suspicions ; and after going round and discussing matters with her mother, she drove next morning to the neighbourhood of the Bank of England. " She walked before the Bank, and behind the Bank," says Jeames ; " she came home disperryted, having learned nothink." Then her mother took up the pursuit, and at length was triumphant, and able to tell her daughter, " Now, my love, I have found him. Come with me to-morrow and you shall know all." I relate the sequel in Mr. Yellowplush's own words :

The ladies nex morning set out for the City, and I walked behind, doing the genteel thing, with a nosegay and a goold stick. We walked down the New Road – we walked down the City Road – we walked to the Bank. We were crossing from that heddyfice to the other side of Cornhill, when all of a sudden missis shrieked and fainted spontaceously away. I rushed forrard and raised her in my arms, spiling thereby a new weskit and a pair of crimson smallcloes. I rushed forrard, I say, very nearly knocking down the old crossing sweeper who was hobbling away as fast as possible. We took her to Birch's ; we provided her with a hackney coach and every lucksury, and carried her home to Islington.

Briefly, as Mr. Yellowplush relates, explaining how, some days later a reconciliation between husband and wife was arranged – briefly, Mr. Altamont was that old crossing-sweeper who hobbled away when his wife screamed and fainted – Mr. Altamont, to put it plainly, made his living by sweeping the crossing from the Bank to Cornhill. That was in early Victorian days, but there still is the Bank, thought it has been reconstructed, while Birch's shop, into which the distressed Mrs. Altamont was conveyed, has now been demolished, but the shop front is preserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum at South Kensington.

Talking so much of the City Road reminds me of the Eagle Tavern, which stood at the corner of Shepherdess Walk there. While Cremorne and Vauxhall Gardens were popular pleasure-resorts for the more fashionable part of the community, humbler people found similar but cheaper joys, and not so many of them, at the Eagle, which has been immortalised in that nonsensical old catch –

Up and down the City Road,
In and out the Eagle,
That's the way the money goes,
Pop goes the weasel!

But the old tavern and its restricted pleasure-ground will probably live longest in one of Dickens's *Sketches by Boz* – “Miss Evans and the Eagle.”

Ewing Ritchie brought a dark indictment against that same Eagle, about twenty years later in the century, in his *Night Side of London*. All through his book, Ewing Ritchie is a sombre pessimist; he has not the genial, charitable outlook of Dickens; but you feel he was in earnest and saw what he describes. He rejoices that, by then, “Vauxhall with its drunken orgies is gone never to return”; but there are

still North Woolwich Gardens and Highbury Barn, and these are no better; and out at Chelsea there is Cremorne, which seems innocent enough, he says, with "the ascent of the balloon, the dancing, the equestrian performance, the comic song, the illuminations, the fireworks, the promenade on the grass lawn or in the gas-lit paths," but the place reeks with drink and all manner of dangers that bring young men to ruin. Then he turns to the Eagle Tavern, which since Dickens wrote of it had added the Grecian theatre to its attractions, and he quotes evidence from a parliamentary report to prove that it is the most detrimental place of its kind in London. "There are gardens," says the report, "and statues round the gardens, and everything to attract. [Though this does not strike one now as deliriously attractive]. There is a large theatre, and there are theatrical representations during the week. The gardens are open, with alcoves and boxes on each side, and lads and young persons are taken in there and plied with drink. The house is opened on Sunday evening, but on Sunday evening there is no dramatic representation nor music. I have seen gentlemen come out drunk." And he goes on to give the place the worst possible character. There were gin palaces, he tells you, all over London

where the poor wallowed in drink ; and there were flashy, more expensive haunts of dissipation where well-to-do tradesmen and the aristocracy mingled in enjoyment that seems to have been common in every sense of the word. There was " The Cave of Harmony " in Covent Garden (and, by the way, you have a fairly lurid description of an evening at the Cave of Harmony in the first chapter of Thackeray's *The Newcomes*) ; there were the Cyder Cellars in Maiden Lane ; there were the scandalous Judge and Jury Clubs at various public houses, where the evening's amusement consisted of a mock trial that in many of its details was gross and disgusting - according to Ewing Ritchie, no decent man could listen to most of it unless he had been drinking heavily. One way and another, you gather that the night clubs of these times are harmless and decorous assemblies compared with what went on in the drinking-halls and all night taverns of Victorian days. But the grimmest chapter in Ewing Ritchie's book is one in which he describes how he went to see a man hanged, and his description is confirmed in all its grimness by one of Thackeray's miscellaneous sketches, " On Going to see a Man Hanged," for they both saw the hanging at the same place, though on different occasions.

The gallows at Tyburn had been abolished, and hanging men for mere thefts had been discontinued everywhere. But down to fifty years ago it was still the regular thing to hang men in public outside Newgate jail. And it was to Newgate both Ewing Ritchie and Thackeray went to see that gruesome sight. It was on a Sunday evening when Ritchie went, and a crowd had already collected. "Respectable mechanics, with their wives and children," he writes, "were staring at its dreary stone walls. Ragged boys and girls were romping and laughing in the streets. All the neighbouring public houses were filled with a tipsy crowd. Here and there a few barriers had been erected, and workmen were engaged in putting up more." Two women, who have been drinking, presently start fighting, men and boys shout and encourage them, and the fight does not finish till one of the women is knocked out. The night wears on, and by three in the morning the crowd is getting dense, all the houses opposite along the Old Bailey are lighted up, and well-to-do citizens and their wives, women and young girls, who have paid for seats, are sitting in the rooms looking out of the windows, some with opera

glasses. You can see people through the first floor windows sitting playing cards and drinking champagne to while away the time of waiting. Ritchie took a seat in one of the rooms himself, and says the people about him were laughing and as full of fun as if they were at a theatre. The roar of the crowd outside becomes so great that they can scarcely hear the bell of St. Sepulchre's close by striking the hours. Presently, the big gates of Newgate, along the Old Bailey, swing open, and a huge car drawn by three horses lumbers out with the scaffold, and it is rapidly fixed up under the door in the wall of Newgate, from which the criminal is to emerge. Before eight, a body of police appears and makes a ring round the scaffold. A bell tinkles dismally, horribly. In a few minutes the chaplain, the criminal, and Jack Ketch, the hangman, come out through the small doorway on to the scaffold; then you have a swift, realistic sketch of the dreadful event, one or two women shrieking as the drop falls ; but for an hour the crowd lingers, watching the taut rope attached to the now invisible body, till Jack Ketch reappears, and is hooted while he cuts the body down. Thackeray's description is no less terrible, but he closes with a passionate appeal for the abolition of capital punishment. " I feel myself ashamed

and degraded," he admits, "at the brutal curiosity which took me to that brutal sight ; and I pray to Almighty God to cause this disgraceful sin to pass from among us, and to cleanse our land of blood." His prayer has not yet been answered, but at least we have been shamed out of those public hangings. And in all the Old Bailey now I think there is not one house remaining from whose windows that appalling scene was overlooked, except the old tavern known as the King of Denmark, which wears a subdued, brooding air, as if it were keeping quiet about memories of its past that would shock its unsophisticated neighbours.

9

By way of contrast to these squalors I meant to have shown you, from Disraeli's *Lothair*, something of the elegance of the Bond Street of the period ; or from his *Henrietta Temple*, or *Tancred*, something of the West End in general. But I pass over these to say a word of the Victorian Sunday in London, for it has come down to us as a very special and deplorably wretched feature of that age. But of course there was more than one way of looking at it. In his *Sketch Book* (in the pre-Victorian days of

1819) Washington Irving, as an outsider from America here on a visit, gives you his impressions of it thus :

An English Sunday ; where is its sacred influence more strikingly apparent than in the very heart of that great Babel, London ? On this sacred day, the gigantic monster is charmed into repose. The intolerable din and struggle of the week are at an end. The shops are shut. The fires of forges and manufactories are extinguished ; and the sun, no longer obscured by murky clouds of smoke, pours down a sober, yellow radiance into the quiet streets. The few pedestrians we meet, instead of hurrying forth with anxious countenances, move leisurely along ; their brows are smoothed from the wrinkles of business and care ; they have put on their Sunday looks, and Sunday manners, with their Sunday clothes, and are cleansed in mind as well as in person.

He goes on to speak happily of the melodious clangour of the bells ; of decent tradesmen, their wives and children setting out for church ; and presently, when their flocks are folded in the ancient city churches, of the sound of the organ rolling and vibrating through empty courts and lanes, and the sweet sound of chanting choirs. Then he touches on the afternoon, and the crowds pouring out into the parks and pleasure grounds to enjoy the freedom of the

day. While you read, you can almost regret that the peace of such a Sunday, with its deadness of all trade, has passed away. But it must have degenerated under Victoria, for Dickens offers a very different picture. In his *Sunday Under Three Heads* he trounces those who are responsible for the dullness and hypocritical joylessness of the Victorian Sunday, and you have his attitude toward it in *Little Dorrit* (in 1856), where Arthur Clenham arrives in London on a Sunday, and, oppressed by the settled gloom of the day, "sat in the window of the coffee-house on Ludgate Hill, counting one of the neighbouring bells, making sentences and burdens of songs out of it in spite of himself, and wondering how many sick people it might be the death of in the course of a year. . . . He sat in the same place as the day died, looking at the dull houses opposite, and thinking, if the disembodied spirits of former inhabitants were ever conscious of them, how they must pity themselves for their old places of imprisonment. . . . Presently the rain began to fall in slanting lines between him and those houses. . . . In the country, the rain would have developed a thousand fresh scents, and every drop would have had its bright associations with some beautiful form or growth of life. In the city, it developed

only foul, stale smells, and was a sickly, lukewarm, dirt-stained, wretched addition to the gutters." He watched a crowd sheltering "under the public archway opposite," which must have been the arch into Ludgate Square, and enables you to locate the position of the coffee-house. By and by, Clenham put on his hat and coat and went out through the dismal weather, "crossed by St. Paul's, and made his way to that decaying old house where his mother lived off Thames Street."

10

But it is time we had a glimpse of the great Queen who gave her name to an era that covered more than sixty years of the nineteenth century. We might see her as the beautiful young girl roused at early morning in Kensington Palace to be told that William IV was dead and she was Queen ; or as the sternly dignified, dogged old lady of later years, dressed in black and strangely bonneted, drawn about her garden of Buckingham Palace in a pony-carriage. She has not figured very largely yet in our imaginative literature, so let us take some very characteristic little sketches of her about the time of the Great Exhibition of 1851, which, at the moment, seemed the most important thing that had ever



SWEEDON'S PASSAGE—GRUB STREET
FROM A VIEW BY J. T. SMITH, 1811

(See page 177)



happened in London. The Queen had then been married to Prince Albert over ten years, and these sketches are in the little known Memoirs of Lady Anna Maria Pickering. She shows you the Queen and Prince Albert at the Opera, enthusiastically cheered because on the way there some mad wretch had fired a shot at her carriage which happily missed its mark. She discusses the Queen's dowdy poke-bonnets, and says she had spoken of them to Her Majesty's milliner, who confessed she had tried to change the style of them but the Queen returned the new style of bonnet and insisted that the old pattern should be exactly followed. Lady Pickering gives you pictures of the strict formalities preserved at Court functions. She tells how when she and some of her family were out driving they met the Queen's carriage in a narrow Hampstead lane and pulled into the hedge to let it pass. "There was so little room," she says, "that when the Queen passed, the wheels of her carriage almost touched ours, and she actually stood up, looking to see if they could get by; but Prince Albert, with his greater sense of the proprieties, put out his hand and pulled her down. . . . The Queen was always wonderfully graceful," Lady Pickering continues, "and could throw more meaning into a

bow than could any woman in Europe. I was walking with my husband in Hyde Park, and seeing the scarlet outriders just turning the corner by the Serpentine, we went up to the railings to watch the Queen pass. On the other side of the railings was a gentleman on horse-back, and we saw that it was Prince Albert. We waited to see the meeting, expecting that he would ride up to her carriage and speak to her. But he took off his hat and held it, in the most deferential manner, to the very bow of his saddle, and sat thus, bare-headed and quite immovable, waiting for his Sovereign to pass. His two grooms were also bare-headed. The Queen's carriage came on: as it passed she did *not* acknowledge him with a smile, or a kiss of the hand, as I had expected, but bowed in a perfectly grave and dignified manner – the Queen receiving the homage of the first of her subjects: then her head bent lower, and she threw into her bow all the deference of a wife for the husband whom she honoured above all the world.”

The Great Exhibition of 1851 was held in Hyde Park, in an enormous glass house which was afterwards re-erected as the Crystal Palace at Sydenham. The Prince Consort was largely responsible for inaugurating this vast world's fair; it was open to exhibitors from all over the

earth, and the idea was that by drawing the people of all nations together in that peaceful commercial rivalry it would cultivate a spirit of peace and goodwill betwixt them and lead up to a sort of millennium ; but within a year or two, unfortunately, we were up to our necks in the Crimean War. London, all England, talked and thought of little but the Great Exhibition while it lasted, and it was a great source of inspiration to the humorists, but does not bulk largely in serious literature. Arthur Sketchley, the Mr. Dooley of his day, wrote *Mrs. Brown at the Exhibition*. Thackeray did a ballad of it, in a sort of Irish brogue, and having praised Paxton, who built the glass house, proceeds :

This Palace tall,
 This Crystal Hall,
 Which Imperors might covet,
 Stands in Hyde Park
 Like Noah's Ark,
 A rainbow bent above it.
 'Tis here that roams,
 As well becomes
 Her dignity and stations,
 Victoria great
 And houlds in state
 The Congress of the Nations.

Thackeray catalogues at considerable length the variety of goods that are there exhibited ; and, in a brief prose sketch on " What I Remarkd at the Great Exhibition," he tells of what he saw there in May 1851 of the Queen and Prince Consort. He saw things that pleased him ; noted that when the Queen bowed and curtseyed all the women about began to cry ; noted how the young Prince talked with his sister, and thought it pretty to see them walking hand in hand with their father and mother. Among other things, he says :

I remarked my Lord Ivorystick and my Lord Ebonystick backing all the way round the immense building before the Queen ; and I wondered to myself how long is *that* sort of business going to last ? how long will freeborn men forsake the natural manner of walking, with which God endowed them, and continue to execute this strange and barbarous dance ? I remarked that a Royal Chamberlain was no more made to walk backwards than a Royal coachman to sit on the box and drive backwards.

I I

But all this formality belonged to the notions of decorum and etiquette that were characteristic of the time, and have always struck me as oddly at variance with the riotous Cremorne

and Vauxhall, the loose, dissipated tavern and club life, the crude squalors of living that prevailed all over London. There have been books on Thackeray's London, and even more books on Dickens's London, and from the stories of these two writers alone you can reconstruct streets and whole districts of last century London and the kinds of life that were lived in them from the beginning of Victoria's reign down to about 1870. But as they are so well known I have said little about them. London from the 1850's to the 1870's is no less faithfully portrayed in some of the novels of Charles Kingsley, Shirley Brooks, and in the novels of Mark Rutherford (who touches on those Chartist riots which brought the wrongs of the poor to the doors of the House of Commons) – and Mark Rutherford's novels are far too good to be so neglected as they are. You find much of the London of Dickens in the novels of Lord Lytton and in the half-forgotten novels of Douglas Jerrold and Albert Smith. And something of that earlier London, and more of London in the latter years of the century, is in the novels of Anthony Trollope, Wilkie Collins, Walter Besant, James Greenwood, G. R. Sims, George Gissing, and William De Morgan. For though De Morgan did not start his career as a novelist till he

was nearly seventy, in 1907, he went back in his stories to his recollections of Victorian London, and only in one of them, *Somehow Good*, came up to date in the London of the twopenny tube. London of the nineties, the last decade of last century, is pictured in some of the novels of H. G. Wells, Arthur Morrison, Pett Ridge, Edwin Pugh, and, to say nothing of others, in the *Badalia Herodsfoot* and short stories of Rudyard Kipling, who was then living in Villiers Street, Strand. In the nineties, too, there rose into passing prominence a group of writers who were in revolt against the literary and social conventions of their day, and a certain Bohemian, hectic aspect of the London life of that period looms largely in the "London Nights" and other of the poems of Arthur Symons, in some of the poems of Ernest Dowson, and others of that circle of poets who formed themselves into that Rhymers' Club which used to meet at the Cheshire Cheese, off Fleet Street. But they were a portent; they were not typical of the time, any more than comets are at home in the sky. Their influence is gone, and most of them now are more talked of than read. I always feel that amid the dull stolid Victorian ideals of the late nineteenth century, and amid that feverish revolt against them of those

degenerates, Francis Thompson, with his spiritual, mystical unworldliness, makes as strange and lonely a figure as William Blake did amid the scepticisms and artificialities of the eighteenth century. Francis Thompson lived much in Grub Street, and in a destitute interval went selling bootlaces in the Strand, but he found solace and inspiration, as Blake did, in his visions; he could move about in the squalid London which the best of the contemporary realistic novelists were putting into their books, and the tawdrily or haggardly gay London of those resolutely unconventional poets who revelled irresponsibly at the Café Royal, or took themselves too seriously at the Cheshire Cheese — Francis Thompson could move through all this sort of thing and in the worst of his misfortunes still see angels ascending and descending and all the shining

traffic of Jacob's ladder

Pitched between heaven and Charing Cross,

he could still see, in dark hours,

Christ walking on the water,

Not of Gennesareth, but Thames.

I

LESS than half my own life has been passed in this century, and more than half in the century we have left behind us ; and when I have occasion to look back and think of things I feel as if I had lived not so much in two different centuries as in two different worlds ; the change between then and now is so complete. I was brought up in those obsolete Victorian days whose characteristic architecture was heavy and solid but not beautiful, and when people who desired to be regarded as people of good position overcrowded their rooms with solid and heavy furniture and had a taste for horsehair chairs and couches, and discreetly draped the ends of the couches and the backs of their arm-chairs with antimacassars. This last precaution was essential, as every careful housewife knew, for the mankind of London, and of the nation, wore their hair long at that date and, as a point of elegance, made it glossy by rubbing into it daily large quantities of an oil that was named macassar, and the antimacassars saved the couches and

chairs from being made greasy when the gentlemen leaned their heads on them. Every man who wished to be considered really respectable went about in a top hat that was taller than any you may see to-day, and every lady wore a dress that reached at least to the ground, and grew as much hair as she could and coiled it over two buns on her head, and often wore an artificial front in order to make more of it ; moreover, behind the lower part of her waist she wore another and larger bun, known as a bustle, which was supposed to give grace to the figure, but in effect looked like a hump-back that had slipped out of place. The underground railway was still a comparatively new invention, and was spoken of with pride, though it was so badly ventilated and the engines used coal that gave out so much smoke that when you went down to the platform on damp days, the stations were thick with the smell of sulphur and filled with smoke in which you groped as in a dense fog, so that there were occasional cases of bronchial old ladies and gentlemen having to be carried upstairs for a breath of air before they died of suffocation. On Sundays, it was customary to take the children to church or chapel in the mornings, to send them to Sunday school in the afternoon, and to take them to church or chapel

again in the evenings, if they were not too young. For there was nothing else to do all day, since both work and pleasure were forbidden. To pass the time somehow, it was usual in middle-class households to have a rich and heavy meal in the middle of the day and for adult members of the family to go to sleep after it, like boa constrictors after they have swallowed a rabbit. To keep them quiet during that somnolent period of digestion the children were allowed to read books, but only books of a very moral or improving kind which were generally so dull that the child who could reconcile himself to reading them was usually one who had a natural tendency anyhow to develop into a little prig. There were no Sunday concerts; no Sunday entertainments of any sort; these on that day being stigmatised as wicked. There was a terrible outcry when some unregenerates proposed to open the museums on Sunday, though anything more almost religiously sober than a visit to a museum cannot now be conceived. Now and then one would have unconventional neighbours who furtively played at tennis or croquet in their back gardens on Sunday, and this stamped them at once as persons who were outside the pale of respectable society. The buses were all drawn along at a leisurely pace by horses, and

their floors were strewn with straw in the winter to keep the passengers' feet warm. Four-wheel cabs were popular and found convenient, and the hansom cab was thought to be the last word in swiftness of travel by road. We used to hear now and then of madmen who jumped off roofs with large umbrellas, or clumsily made wings, in an attempt to float or fly to the ground, and sometimes they succeeded and there were triumphant articles in the papers, and sometimes they simply made a mess of it and hurt themselves, and we used to smile about it and say it was, of course, ridiculous ; that men were not meant to fly and would never be able to. There was talk about the telephone, but it was looked upon more or less as a toy. The street hawkers used to sell it in the street - it consisted of a few yards of string with a cardboard receiver at each end, so that you could stand on one side of a room and somebody else on the other, and you talked through your receiver while he put his ear to his, and if he could hear what you said, and he was, in fact, near enough to do that even if there had been no string, we used to say it was rather wonderful and there might be something in it, but we felt very doubtful.

There were ever so many other things that were only beginning to be vaguely talked of, or

had never been heard of at all in the later years of last century that are now everyday, commonplace conveniences – such as aeroplanes, telephones, wireless, motor-cars, motor-buses and trams, electric trains, tube railways, and scores of other new developments. Even the A.B.C. shops are new within my time, and have now almost driven the stuffy old coffee-shops, with their tables ranged in high pews, out of existence ; and unless you are old enough to remember it yourself you will hardly believe how shocked we were, while I was young, when girls and sometimes mature women appeared in the streets shamelessly riding on bicycles. Typewriting then was very much in its infancy, and some of the judges sternly resented the innovation when typewritten documents were placed before them. There were no girl clerks in any City office, and the first few who presently broke with convention and undertook such work were regarded as unladylike and rather indelicate.

All that, and much more like it, has gone, and it seems to me to have gone quite suddenly after the Victorian era ended at the end of last century. In modern novels you find office girls introduced unsensationally, as a matter of course, just as you find milliners and shopgirls introduced into Victorian novels. Girls in modern

novels smoke cigarettes as naturally as in the Victorian novels they darned stockings or knitted table-mats. In the novels of Michael Arlen, W. L. George, and others, they even drink cocktails as readily as in Victorian novels they would have fainted at the suggestion of such an impropriety.

2

And while all these changes have been coming over the manners and habits of London's social life, and entering accordingly into the imaginative literature that has been written since this century began, similarly drastic changes have been taking place in the topography of London. In my early days, at the corner of the Poultry and Prince's Street, right opposite the Mansion House, there still stood an ancient tavern with a red-tiled roof and with two steps leading down to its sanded bar. On the kerb facing this tavern was a standpipe and two or three shallow green buckets, presided over by an aged porter, who in winter used to stamp his frozen feet there and muffle himself in two or three cape overcoats. It was his business to water the bus horses. The buses would come down Cheapside and stop at that corner, and while the old porter was giving the horses water from his buckets, the driver

climbed down and went in the tavern to have a drink of another kind. There was no hurry. No policeman came to move them on. They took their time, and when the horses and the driver and the conductor were sufficiently refreshed, they made ready and went on their way again without any stir or excitement at all. You can't imagine that happening opposite the Mansion House to-day, when the pavements are crammed with pedestrians and the road congested with traffic, and a policeman standing in the middle of the road to see that no bus lingers a moment by the roadside after he has signalled the endless stream of all manner of vehicles to go on. Well, that ancient tavern has been long since demolished and an imposing bank has been erected on its site. At that date, too, round here in the Strand, the old Cock Tavern still stood at the corner of Bell Yard beside the Law Courts, which were just about to be opened. It was the same old Cock Tavern to which Pepys went so often with his lady and gentlemen friends; the place that Tennyson frequented, as he tells you in his "Will Water-proof's Lyrical Monologue," beginning,

O plump head-waiter at the Cock,
To which I most resort.

But that also has been demolished, and on its site has risen another bank—the Law Courts Branch of the Bank of England. To take one other instance—when I lived in that different world in the last century, in the Strand, facing the Law Courts, was a quaint little by-way named Thanet Place. Its arched entrance was so narrow that you might easily go by without noticing it. George Gissing knew it, and I was the more interested in it when I found that he made the girl, Ida Starr, in his novel *The Unclassed*, live there. He tells how one evening, under the Pall Mall colonnade, Ida Starr met Wymark, and he walked home with her. “She led the way into the Strand,” writes Gissing. “At no great distance from Temple Bar she turned into a small court.” It becomes clear in the story that this court was Thanet Place, which was a *cul-de-sac*, with a high blank wall at the end shutting it off from the Temple which lay behind it. There were two short rows of trim, neat, Georgian houses in it, with small-paned windows and creepers growing up the fronts of them. Two white steps went up to each of their little green doors that had shining brass knockers, and it looked like a sleepy, pleasant old street in a quiet country town. But Thanet Place has also vanished, and curiously

enough its ground is now occupied by yet another bank. These are typical of the alteration that is going on all about London, and without being too fanciful you can read a kind of symbolism into them. London is becoming a larger, louder, more crowded, more strenuous city; it is always in a hurry now; it never has any time to spare; commerce is getting the upper hand and thrusting the romance of it into the background; it is a cleaner, statelier city than it was, but gets less and less picturesque; and as it grows larger and busier it necessarily grows less homely, less an object of affection and more an object for wonder. It is too big now for anyone to be easily familiar with it, and unless they are familiar with the place, it is impossible for men to love it as Lamb and Dickens loved it. This is inevitably and rightly reflected in modern novels that concern themselves with it. Few of them are half the length of the Victorian novels; they accommodate themselves to the scanty leisure of the general reader, and, to save as much of their restricted space as possible for the story, they take the reader's knowledge of London largely for granted—more often than not they name the suburb or the street in which their characters live but do not stop to describe either, so that it looks as if Londoners of the



THE DAIRY—WHITE HART YARD,
BROOKE STREET, HOLBORN
NOW DEMOLISHED

(See page 184)

future may find plenty of pictures of present-day London life in our contemporary novels, but no such minutely detailed re-creations of the houses and lanes and streets of London as are in the novels of the nineteenth century and the imaginative works that were written in earlier ages.

I am not saying that romance is dead in London, only that with continual demolition and rebuilding London is losing much of its romantic appearance ; romance survives in it, and is not all in its old associations. Romantic-looking nooks and corners there are still in plenty, and in spite of their business preoccupations, their increasing struggle for existence, and the effect upon them of their well-organised, unromantic surroundings, romance enters as freely as ever into the everyday lives of London's enormous population. Even literature has become more of a business than it used to be. Literary Bohemia has dwindled to a fairy-tale, a legend of the past. The old style of Bohemian clubs are all dead ; the war killed the last of them. Authors nowadays work as regularly and sedulously as lawyers and stock-brokers do ; they are no longer careless about money, but employ agents to manage their affairs, and as soon as they are at all successful

they live in good houses and dress for dinner and are as conventional and respectable as any class of society. Yet there is an obscurer side of the literary world in which romance, often a rather sorrowful and tragic form of romance, still maintains its ancient kingdom.

In writing of eighteenth-century London I tried to give some sketch of the literary Grub Street of that period which was so brutally satirised by Pope and Swift. It is sometimes said – it has been said to me more than once – that Grub Street is a thing of the past – that it does not exist nowadays ; but I happen to know that it does, and by way of illustrating how, amid all the changes that are going on around us, some things remain entirely unchanged I would like to tell you stories of one man who lived in Grub Street but has come out of it, and of one who is still living in it.

3

A few years before the war a book entitled *The Soul's Destroyer, and Other Poems* was published, bound in a dingy paper cover ; and, instead of a publisher's name, it had at the foot of the title-page only the author's address, which was the Farmhouse, Marshalsea Road, Southwark. I

knew something of the Farmhouse, for long before I had read a description of it in one of Dickens's miscellaneous sketches. You see you can never go far about London without running up against Dickens. That Farmhouse was, and still is, a common lodging-house, a doss-house, where destitute men can go and get a night's lodging for a few pence. Before the war it was fourpence ; it may have increased since ; I don't know. They could take their own food in, if they had any, and there was a big fire in a big, bare kitchen where they could do their own cooking. Somewhere about the 1860's, in his travels around London, Dickens went one night to the Farmhouse with Inspector Field. He took that police officer with him because in those days, at any rate, Marshalsea Road was a dangerous neighbourhood after dark, and thieves and ruffians of all sorts were included among the lodgers in the Farmhouse. The place when I went to see it was, and I believe is to-day, exactly what it was when Dickens visited it. The Farmhouse, he says, "is the old Manor House of those parts and stood in the country once. . . . This long, paved yard was a garden or a paddock once, or a court in front of the Farm House. Perchance with a dovecot in the centre, and fowls pecking

about – with fair elm trees, then, where discoloured chimneystacks and gables are now – noisy then with rooks which have yielded to a different sort of rookery. It is likelier than not, Inspector Field thinks, as we turn into the common kitchen, which is in the yard and many paces from the house.” You approach the Farmhouse through a passage that is tunnelled under the house that faces the Marshalsea Road, and at the end of the passage you leave the kitchen, an outbuilding, on your right, cross the paved yard, and there is the Farmhouse in front of you, a dingy red brick building with a short flight of steps up to its door. Here the manager, or deputy, has a room or two for himself, and allows a lodger, as a favour, to receive guests in his parlour. Upstairs and down are a number of narrow cubicles in which the lodgers go to bed, when they are tired of sitting in the kitchen. It is a gloomy, shabby place for poetry to come out of, but the man who published that book from that dingy place is now recognised as one of the truest and best poets we have living to-day. He was born in the country and worked on a farm – not industriously, for he disliked work – till his grandfather died and left him a sum of fifty pounds and, in addition, an annuity of eight shillings a week for life. He promptly

resolved to gratify a longing to see the world, and went to America. He went by steerage to save expense, and had a brief good time in America till his fifty pounds was exhausted ; then he served as a waiter in New York restaurants ; got tired of this and set out to tramp the country as a beggar, picking up odd jobs by the way. Then the great gold boom started in the Klondyke, and he felt this gave him an opportunity to get rich easily and quickly. As he was without means, he tried to make the journey free of charge by jumping a train – that is, by dodging in between two carriages and sitting on the buffers, just as the train was starting and the guard was not looking. But he slipped in making the jump and fell under the wheels, and that put an end to his golden dream of Klondyke. He was carried to a hospital and, in due course, helped by his friends at home, came back to England with a wooden leg. He had already been writing verse, but no papers would accept it, and he soon came to the conclusion that no poet could do any good for himself unless he lived in the centre of things in London. So he quitted his mother's rural cottage, and to London he came, and, having only his eight shillings a week annuity to live upon, he put up at the Farmhouse as a permanent

lodger. He went on writing verse, but still the papers would not accept any, so he decided that the only way for a poet to make a lot of money was to publish a volume. He offered a manuscript volume to several publishers, who rejected it, and at last one offered to publish it if the author would pay twenty pounds toward the cost of the venture. This struck him as a good business proposition ; he put the scheme before the trustees who paid him his weekly allowance, and suggested that they should lend him twenty pounds that he might take this chance of making his fortune. But the trustees were practical men ; they had no faith in poetry, and not much in him, being aware of his disinclination to work. So they told him if he would do without his eight shillings a week till it had accumulated to ten pounds they would then pay him that sum and also lend him ten pounds, and he would have to do without his weekly payments again until that second ten had been worked off. It was a difficult proposition, but, convinced that if his book was once out it would sell and he would soon be famous and affluent, he accepted the offer. To meet the problem of living without his income, he bought a few packets of thread and a few packets of needles, left the doss-house, and tramped into

the country as a pedlar. People, he told me, were kind to him, seeing he was a cripple. Cottagers would give him a meal ; some bought his goods ; and when things came to the worst and he reached a town of evenings with nothing in his pockets, he would sing in the streets, and so never failed to raise the price of a night's lodgings. When his time of probation was past, he returned to London, received the ten pounds then due to him and the loan of the further ten, and passed this cash over to the publisher, and presently the book was published. Fifty copies were sent out for review, but perhaps its insignificant appearance and the fact of its being issued from a doss-house was against it — anyhow, no paper reviewed it, and not a single copy was sold. This reduced him to desperation ; for his income was stopped until the second ten pounds had been refunded, and except by picking up stray jobs in the markets, or singing in the streets again, he could not raise enough to pay the fourpence a night for his lodging and buy food. In these straits he hit upon an idea, and, going to a public library, looked in a *Who's Who* and copied out the names and addresses of persons connected with literature who might be interested in his book, and he posted a copy of the book to each of these with a letter

requesting him to remit the price of it, half a crown, if he thought it was worth the money. My name occurring among those under the letter A, one of the earliest copies, with that letter, came to me. I read the book and saw, as anyone could, that though there was doggerel in it, there was also some poetry in it that was genuine and fine. So I wrote for one or two copies and told the poet that an ordinary review would not make the book sell, but one could read between the lines that he had a story of his own, and if he cared to tell me that and let me tell it in the review, that might rouse a public interest and get the book going. I suggested he should meet me anywhere this side of London Bridge, for I fancied he might be diffident about my calling at the doss-house, and he appointed Finch's tavern in Bishopsgate, and said he would have a copy of the book sticking out of his pocket so that I might identify him. But I was sure from one of the poems that he had a wooden leg and that I should know him by this, and there sure enough, I found him, in the four-ale bar, a shy little man with a wooden leg. He was too shy at first to say much, and the bar was crowded and noisy, so presently we went out and round the corner to the saloon bar, which was nearly empty and quiet, and after we had

sat talking for a while on the lounge he began to unbosom himself freely, unfolded all his story, and said he did not care how public I made it so long as it sold his book and brought in money to help him out of his troubles. At that time I was doing a good deal of reviewing for the *Daily Mail*, and wrote a column telling frankly the story of this poet's life, and quoting some of the best bits from his book. The editor did not think that all this about a tramp in a doss-house was the sort of thing for the literary columns, but published it on one of the news pages, and the result was amazing. Other papers at once began to review the book; some who had apparently lost it sent over to the doss-house to buy it; critics called there out of curiosity to see him, photographers went there, interviewers from *Answers* and other popular journals, and ladies drove up there in their carriages and terrified him almost to death by leaving cards inviting him to their At Homes. He was much too frightened to attend any of those functions, but he had got all the five hundred copies that had been printed of his book *The Soul's Destroyer*, and was selling them rapidly by post and to people who called. Then a good-natured literary agent wrote saying two of his clients had asked him to get the book for them, and if the

poet had any copies left, and would send them to him, he could secure special prices for them. So he carried the last fifty copies to that agent, who sold them for him at half a guinea and a guinea apiece. And you may guess how that poet has risen since in the public esteem if I add that a few weeks ago a collector of first-editions offered me five pounds for my copy of the book. Nowadays, the poet lives in the country, has a Civil List pension, is greatly respected by the critics, and his books bring him in all the income he needs.

4

So you see romance is not dead in London, however unromantic the city may be looking. I shall tell of the other case – of the man who is still in Grub Street – much more briefly. This man was a clerk in the City and a free-lance journalist before the war, but after he was demobilised he could not settle down. He too went tramping all over the country, sleeping under haystacks or in casual wards, and begging as he went. He drifted back to London, and, failing to get work, and having a habit of drinking the little money he picked up, he ultimately retired into a workhouse at Homerton,

and stayed there for a year. During this seclusion, in the common room, with other paupers chatting round about him, he wrote a play, and one day sent it to me. It was a remarkably good play, but terribly sombre – a story of the low life he knew so well. It went to a society which reported on it in glowing terms, and said if he would add another scene to make it long enough, and would cut out two gruesome incidents that could not well be shown on the stage, they would put it before Sybil Thorndike and believed she would take it. However, it went against his artistic conscience to cut out the gruesome bits, he flatly refused to cut them out – and no more could be done. Later, however, he fell down a flight of the workhouse steps and broke his leg, and, while he was laid up in the infirmary, he got pencil and paper and relieved the monotony of lying on his back by re-writing the play as a novel. He made the novel less gruesome than the play and more sentimental, and, after one refusal, it was accepted by a leading London publisher and published. It brought him enough to enable him to quit the workhouse and go into cheap lodgings outside. It did more, for, the tale of his own misfortunes getting into the papers, a barrister in the Temple wrote asking him to call, and, after some talk,

offered to allow him ten pounds a month for six months, so that he might be able to remain out of the workhouse and have every opportunity to do his best for himself by writing another novel in comfort. But it was a mistake to give him that ten pounds in a lump at the beginning of each month. He wrote a few short stories, some of which got into the periodicals and yielded him small sums, but at the end of the six months the new novel had not even been started, and now he has gone back again into the workhouse, for, though the first novel was fairly praised by the reviewers, it had no large sale, and he will draw nothing more from it. But if romance were dead in London that lawyer would never have been moved by what he read in a newspaper to befriend that broken author and give him another chance.

5

These romances, you may say, are affairs of the spirit ; it is the human element in them that counts, and the brick and mortar London which formed their environment is inconsequent by comparison. That may be, yet if a novelist of genius were writing the stories of these two men, think how much more intimately he would

bring them home to our understanding, how much more living and poignant he would make them, if he revealed each man fully in his exact surroundings, so that his readers could realise for themselves just what manner of place was the doss-house in which the one man wrote and from which he published his book of poems ; and minutely just what it means to live in a workhouse and pursue the literary calling in that refuge for the destitute. Dickens would have done that ; so would Thackeray ; so would Trollope, a great realist, if London low life had come within his range — he did it thoroughly when he was writing of the higher life with which he was better acquainted. But most of the novelists of to-day do not do that ; they are either less observant, or have not space to do it in their shorter novels, or, with the modern sense of hurry upon them that is upon us all, they have not patience to draw a scene in detail, but touch in a hasty impression that is graphic as far as it goes, though it leaves the reader with only a vague notion of the reality — unless he happens to be already sufficiently acquainted with that scene to be able to make the most of a brilliant hint and fill in all the detail for himself. I wonder whether this vagueness, these omissions, this

leaving the background so much in outline, may not help to explain why the present-day novel makes such a much feebler impression on the reader than the older novels did? In construction and in the writing of them, the new novels are often more artistic than the old; the characters are as truthfully drawn and subtler in their psychology; yet none of them – not Galsworthy's Forsytes, who in a shadowy fashion haunt the west of London; not Wells's Mr. Polly, who lived for a while at Clapham, have become so absolutely real to us, seem so much as if, like ourselves, they had once walked the streets in the flesh, as Pickwick does, or Sam and Tony Weller, or Dick Swiveller, or Mrs. Gamp, or Mr. Micawber, or Becky Sharp, or Colonel Newcome, and I feel that may be to some extent because those people of Dickens and Thackeray have not only characters and names, but local habitations – we know not only what they did and how they lived, but very precisely where they lived and everything about them. There is a tavern in Jewin Street, Aldersgate, which they will tell you, as if they were speaking of a real person, was Dick Swiveller's house of call, and it is labelled outside as such. There are still in Southwark remains of the inn at which they will tell you

Pickwick met Sam Weller; there is still in Staple Inn the house with the initials P.J.T. carved in the stone over its door, in which Mr. Grewgious had his offices; the actual house still remains in Lincoln's Inn Fields where Mr. Tulkinghorn was murdered; in that old church over in the Borough they will show you the huge registers on which Little Dorrit rested her head when she slept there; up the George and Vulture yard in Lombard Street is the ancient George and Vulture inn where Mr. Pickwick made his headquarters in London, and they have his portrait in a snug room upstairs, and the whole place is still redolent of his personality. All this must have helped, I think, to give those characters the amazingly vital sense of actuality with which they appeal to us; it helped to make them belong to London as part of its visible existence, so that even when their houses are pulled down we keep photographs of them and remember the sites of them, as we remember vanished places where Pepys lived, or Dr. Johnson. But as a rule the present-day novelist stops short of that realism.

6

When Kipling was living at the lower end

of Villiers Street, Strand, he wrote, among other things, *The Record of Badalia Herodsfoot*. It was a story of slum life in the East End, and as he was unfamiliar with those parts he went and lodged in a room down there for two or three weeks in order to study the neighbourhood and its inhabitants. The story he wrote out of those experiences was a drab, grim, luridly melodramatic story of half-savage men and women in London's underworld, but it is exaggerated, its brutalities are over-emphasised, there is no other side to the picture; it is a clever sketch by a man of genius who was out of his element and looking on at a state of life which was alien to him – looking on from outside and guessing at what he could not see. The story catches brilliantly – for when he is working in the world that he knows Kipling is a masterly realist – it catches brilliantly certain outstanding, aggressive aspects of East End life and character, but it supplies no scenery, it assumes that the reader knows the place and can fill in the scenery for himself. He tells you that Badalia lived at 17 Gunniston Street; that “the customs of Gunniston Street do not differ from those of the Barralong,” and unless you know what the customs of Barralong are you are no wiser for that; he mentions

that "Badalia, arrogant, fluffy-fringed, and perfectly unlicensed in speech, won a recognised place among such as labour in Gunniston Street," and that "women is cruel put upon in Gunniston Street," but he does not indicate in what East End parish Gunniston Street was located, and gives you no more hint of its architecture or general appearance than he does of Hennessey's Rents, which he merely remarks "lay more than two miles from Gunniston Street, and were inhabited by much the same class of people." This haziness in topographical matters, this drawing his characters and leaving them in the air, instead of planting their feet firmly on the earth and supplying them with a definite, recognisable home among us, is the besetting sin of the modern novelist of London life, so that his work in future may have historical value as recording the manners of the time and how the twentieth-century Londoner lived, but will have little value as a record of London itself, of the sort of streets and houses in which those stories were enacted.

Wells is one of the exceptions; Pett Ridge is another. Wells is often inspired by the spirit of place, and conjures a London house or a London street into his pages complete in every particular of colour and character. He gets

all Pimlico into *The Dream* ; and if, in *Mr. Polly*, he is indefinite about Clapham, and the shop in which Mr. Polly worked, beyond saying " it dealt chiefly in ready-made suits, fed its assistants in an underground dining-room, and kept open until twelve on Saturdays," he gives you a sufficient idea of King's Road, Chelsea, and of South Kensington Art Museum in *Love and Mr. Lewisham*, and in the same book introduces an admirable little panorama of the streets in relating how Mr. Lewisham and Ethel Henderson went for a walk together on Christmas Eve :

It is well [says the story] that you should have the picture of them right : Lewisham in the ready-made overcoat, blue cloth and velvet collar, dirty tan gloves, red tie, and bowler hat ; and Ethel in a two-year-old jacket, and hat of curly Astrachan ; both pink-cheeked from the keen air, shyly arm in arm occasionally, and very alert to miss no possible spectacle. The shops were varied and interesting along the Brompton Road, but nothing to compare with Piccadilly. There were windows in Piccadilly so full of costly little things, it took fifteen minutes to get them done, card shops, drapers' shops full of foolish, entertaining attractions. Lewisham, in spite of his old animosities, forgot to be severe on the Shopping Class, Ethel was so vastly entertained by all these pretty follies.

Then up Regent Street, by the place where the sham

diamonds are, and the place where the girls display their long hair, and the place where the little chickens run about in the window, and so into Oxford Street, Ludgate Hill, St. Paul's Churchyard, to Leadenhall, and the markets where turkeys, geese, ducklings and chickens – turkeys predominant, however – hang in rows of a thousand at a time.

Lewisham feels he must buy something in the way of brooches or clasps, but Ethel dissuades him and urges that if he must spend money, she is hungry, let them have something to eat.

An immense and memorable joke [the story continues], Lewisham plunged recklessly – orientally – into an awe-inspiring place with mitred napkins. They lunched on cutlets – stripped the cutlets to the bone – and little crisp brown potatoes, and they drank between them a whole half bottle – some white wine or other Lewisham selected in an off-hand way from the list. Ethel was aghast at his magnificence and drank a glass and a half. Then, very warm and comfortable, they went down by the Tower ; and the Tower Bridge, with its crest of snow, huge pendent icicles, and the ice-blocks choked in its side arches, were seasonable seeing. And as they had had enough of shops and crowds they set off resolutely along the desolate Embankment homeward. But indeed the Thames was a wonderful sight that year ! ice-fringed along either shore, and with drift-ice in the middle reflecting a luminous scarlet from the setting sun, and moving steadily, incessantly seaward.

A swarm of mewling gulls went to and fro, and with them mingled pigeons and crows. The buildings on the Surrey side were dim and grey and very mysterious, the moored, ice-blocked barges silent and deserted, and here and there a lit window shone warm. The sun sank right out of sight into a bank of blue, and the Surrey side dissolved in mist save for a few insoluble spots of yellow light, that presently became many. And after our lovers had come under Charing Cross Bridge, the Houses of Parliament rose before them at the end of a great crescent of golden lamps, blue and faint, halfway between the earth and sky. And the clock on the Tower was like a November sun.

Nothing could be more graphic or more real. All that panorama is exactly true and alive. Ethel and Mr. Lewisham step rather abruptly from Tower Bridge to the Embankment, which is a mile of streets away from it, but such an elision is of no moment; you rather wish, though, that since Wells is so realistic in naming and sketching his streets, the market, the bridge, and everything else, he had not taken his two wayfarers into a nameless restaurant; it reduces that place to an uncertainty, and you somehow seem to lose them until they come out again. You suspect that Wells did not really know any actual restaurant in that district, and sent them to an indefinite one of a kind he guessed would be found there.

It is a trivial point, but it serves as an apology for my notion that London has grown so enormous that it is almost impossible for any one author to know much of it intimately; impossible for any to love this vast city, so highly organised that it seems to regulate its lives and carry on its work by machinery, as earlier authors could love the London which muddled along more carelessly and was small enough for them to be able to feel at home all over it. I fancy some touch of realism would be missing from the *Canterbury Tales* if Chaucer had started his pilgrims from an imaginary inn instead of from the actually existing Tabard Inn in the Borough High Street; and some touch of realism would be missing from Falstaff's London relations if the Boar's Head had been an invention of Shakespeare's instead of a well-known tavern in Eastcheap. They tell me that nowadays authors do not walk so much as of yore; that some who write about London go exploring it in their cars, and so see only the surface of things and gather impressions instead of full, inside knowledge. That was not Dickens's way, and no imaginative writer has to any extent succeeded him as

London's social historian. He worked in London when he was young, in the blacking factory, in a lawyer's office, and as a newspaper reporter; and, even after he was famous, he spent days and nights tramping all through the town, in and out of its queer courts and alleys and obscure by-ways, for the sheer joy of seeing all that was to be seen of it and its endless variety of people, until he knew it and its varying moods and idiosyncrasies and intricate geography more exhaustively, I suppose, than any man has known them since. In a little book, written just after Dickens died, George Augustus Sala relates how well he was known by sight to most of the passers-by in the London streets,

with his thought-lined face, his grizzled beard, his wondrous searching eyes, his bluff presence and swinging gait as, head aloft [writes Sala], he strode now through crowded streets, looking seemingly neither to the right nor the left, but of a surety looking at and into everything. . . . He was to be met, by those who knew him, everywhere. . . . He would make his appearance in the oddest places and in the most inclement weather: in Ratcliffe Highway, on Haverstock Hill, on Camberwell Green, in Gray's Inn Lane, in the Wandsworth Road, at Hammersmith Broadway, in Norton Folgate, and at Kensal New Town. A hansom cab whirled you by the

Bell and Horns at Brompton, and there was Charles Dickens striding, as with seven-league boots, seemingly in the direction of North-end, Fulham. The Metropolitan Railway disgorged you at Lisson Grove, and you met Charles Dickens plodding sturdily toward the Yorkshire Stingo. He was to be met rapidly skirting the grim brick wall of the prison in Coldbath Fields, or trudging along the Seven Sisters Road at Holloway, or bearing, under a steady press of sail, through Highgate Archway, or pursuing the even tenor of his way up the Vauxhall Bridge Road.

8

I am not suggesting that our novelists to-day do not know London ; all of them know something about it ; some of them know a good deal about it ; but most of them know only a limited area with any thoroughness, and have a slighter acquaintance perhaps with the rest of the town. Even novelists devoted almost wholly to country life bring their story to the city occasionally and touch in a few London scenes ; Sheila Kaye-Smith does that, and Eden Phillpotts, Mrs. Henry Dudeney, and Archibald Marshall, to say nothing of others. There have been many that chronicle, generally with a little genial satire or cynicism, the experiences of the London journalist, and take Fleet Street

for their centre of interest. One such novel is *Mightier than the Sword*, by Alphonse Courlander, a very able journalist and novelist who died tragically during the war. Another is *The Torch*, by Albert Kinross; his magazine editor with his easy-going staff in Fetter Lane, and his pictures of the larger newspaper world, are as true and as good as the crowded pictures of the same world that are in Philip Gibbs's *The Street of Adventure*. Thomas Burke specialises in Limehouse; he is away over in south London and in north London in what I think is the very best of his books, *The Wind and the Rain*, but he has been labelled the laureate of Chinatown and, even if he overloads his canvas at times with dark or startling colours, he knows how to write, and nobody has done more to reveal to us the strangeness and grimness of that district he outlines in one of his *Nights in Town*.

"To turn from East India Dock Road to West India Dock Road," he tells you there, "is to turn, contradictorily, from West to East, from a fury of lights and noise and faces into a stillness almost chaste. At least, chaste is the first word you think of. In a few seconds you feel it is the wrong epithet. Something . . . something there is in this dusky, throttled

by-way that seems to be crawling into your blood. The road seems to slink before you ; and you know that, once in, you can only get out by retracing your steps or crossing into the lost Isle of Dogs. Against the wrath of October cloud, little low shops peer at you. In the sharp shadows their lights fall like swords across your path. The shuttered gloom of the eastern side shows strangely menacing. Each whispering house seems an abode of dread things. Each window seems filled with frightful eyes. Each corner, half lit by a timid gas-jet, seems to harbour unholy features. A black man with Oriental features brushes against you. You collide with a creeping yellow man. He says something — it might be Chinese, or Japanese, or Philippinese jargon. A huge Hindoo shuffles cat-like against the shops. A fried fish bar, its windows covered with Scandinavian phrases, flings a burst of melodious light for which you are grateful. No ; chaste was certainly not the right word. Say, rather, furtive, sinister. You are in Limehouse. The peacefulness seems to be that attendant upon underhand designs, and the twilight is that of people who love it because their deeds are evil." Elsewhere, in *Limehouse Nights* and other of his books, he introduces you to the Chinese

opium dens in that neighbourhood, and shows it to be a lawless, violent neighbourhood, where horrors and dangers lurk for the unwary. H. M. Tomlinson is very much at home in the same district, and if there are horrors there, he is used to them and takes them easily, and insists that they are more imaginary than real. However that may be, I know of no finer, vivid, more sympathetic studies of the dock labourers, none that give you more wonderfully the atmosphere, odours, and feeling of the docks and riverside life, than are in H. M. Tomlinson's fascinating, quietly realistic book, *London River*.

9

Arthur Morrison has done some of the sternest and most remarkable stories of the squalors of the East End, but he has written no book for several years because, he once told me, he found it impossible to live by literature and had no inclination to die by it. East and West London, in its ordinary domestic habits, in its night-club orgies, at work or at play, have been realistically or idealistically presented in the novels and stories of Neil Lyons, Edwin Pugh, Temple Thurston, Dion Clayton Calthrop, Alec Waugh, W. B. Maxwell, Anthony Hope,

E. F. Benson, Peggy Webling, Jerome, Stephen McKenna, Hugh Walpole, Priestley, Zangwill (who has brought the Jewish Ghetto out of the London streets into his pages), Frank Swinnerton, who knows all that is to be known of London suburban moods and manners; J. D. Beresford, H. A. Vachell, Somerset Maugham, who in *Liza of Lambeth* rivals the raw humanity of Arthur Morrison's tales of the underworld, and in other of his novels enters into the comedy and tragi-comedy of life at the more fashionable end of the town. But the list of imaginative writers who make London, or some part of London, their province is too long to continue. They may fall short of greatness, but in the main they do tell the truth, so far as they go, and when the London that is round us has faded and been rebuilt and is changed beyond recognition, I think the folk of the future might get an ampler, livelier idea of the then vanished London of to-day from their books than from any more matter-of-fact records. None of them comes so near to carrying on the Dickens tradition as Pett Ridge does; he works to a smaller scale, impressionistically, economising words and space as Dickens never did; but the City has got into his blood - he was a clerk in it once himself -

he really *knows* Kentish and Camden Towns, Camberwell, Whitechapel, Peckham, and all those parts, and all about the folk who live in those parts, and he has drawn a long gallery of portraits of shopkeepers, factory workers, men and women clerks, lodging-house keepers, office boys, cabmen, policemen, domestic servants, costermongers, and all manner of other typical Londoners of higher or lower degree, and there they are alive in his books as in a world of their own, which is a faithful copy in little of this world of London which we can go about tomorrow and see for ourselves. He tramps all over London, as Dickens did ; you never know where or when you are going to run up against him among the crowd in the street ; he is one of the most sociable and active as well as one of the most observant of novelists. When his small servant in *Name of Garland* comes out on Sunday and walks up the Fortess Road, Kentish Town, she sees everything she passes – the clock thrust out above the jeweller's, placards of Sunday papers outside the paper-shops, all the insignificant details that go to make up the recognisable features of the road. Pett Ridge has a keen sense of humour, and as keen a sense of the pathos, hardship, disadvantage that hamper the lives of the multitude,

but he has an instinctive realisation of the compensations that alleviate even the dullest and drabdest existence, and never makes the mistake of assuming that what looks unbearable to an outsider is wholly unbearable to the man who is inside and bearing it. This understanding, his genial charity and abounding humour and humanity, are Pett Ridge's peculiar and sufficient qualifications for interpreting the minds and hearts of average Londoners.

But for the most masterly realistic picture that has been made in recent years of any quarter of London, I would go to Arnold Bennett's *Riceyman's Steps*. The shop and houses on Riceyman's Steps, the square and the church at the top of them, the section of King's Cross Road you can see as you stand on the steps and look down — every necessary detail is etched in so exactly that if it were all wiped out to-morrow, it could be precisely rebuilt on its present lines from Bennett's description. And as you read, the dull, dingy industrial district of Clerkenwell thereabouts grows up round you and shuts you in with its characteristic sights and atmosphere. Nobody has done the thing so completely since the days of Gissing.

Yet, minutely and convincingly real as is

Mr. Earlfoward, the second-hand bookseller in that story of Bennett's, real as are Mr. Polly, Kipps, and the Forsytes, they do not seem to have the power to step out of their books and familiarise themselves to us in the way that Dickens's and Shakespeare's characters can, as if they had been no mere airy fancies but were flesh and blood persons. Only one character in fiction of recent years has possessed this magic of coming to life, and that one is Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes. He is not drawn so subtly, so amply, with such entire lifelikeness as are those characters of Bennett, Wells, and Galsworthy, yet he has taken his place, at all events for the present, in that gallery of fictitious characters who are more vigorously alive than are many men who are actually living. When Doyle wrote a story in which Sherlock Holmes announced that he meant to retire and take up residence in the country, letters came to Sherlock, care of Conan Doyle, asking if he would need a gardener and applying for the post; and when a party of French schoolboys were brought over on a visit, they were asked on arriving in London what they would like to see first, and they agreed that they would like to go and see the house where Sherlock Holmes lived in Baker Street.

Why Sherlock Holmes should have succeeded in so impressing his personality on the popular mind while such characters as Kipps and Mr. Polly remain almost phantasmal by comparison is more than I shall try to explain.

Two books I would recommend to any interested in London are *The Heart of London* and *The Spell of London* by H. V. Morton, a sensitive, impressionistic, very modern author who is doing I think for London to-day what the *Sketches by Boz* did for the London of ninety years ago.

It becomes clear to you, in reading contemporary imaginative literature, that London to-day is broader-minded, more tolerant, more democratic, less troubled with snobbery and hypocrisy, than was Victorian London. It has its vices—plenty of them—but on the whole, when you look back, you are brought to the conclusion that London is not worse in any way than it was in the ages that are gone, and in many ways it is immeasurably better. Cottages and gardens are gone from Cornhill, the gardens and the brook from Holborn, and the river flows no more past the end of Fleet Street; but we are no longer decimated by those terrible plagues that brought misery and death to London every century, and two or

three times a century, down to the middle of the seventeenth ; we no longer burn each other in Smithfield for any reason whatever ; we no longer hang each other in public and make an entertainment of it at Tyburn or outside Newgate. And for the rest – what the city has lost in picturesqueness it has gained in spaciousness and healthfulness ; and what it has lost in homeliness has passed over to its people, for we are not kept so far apart from each other as our predecessors were by foolish social barriers ; we are drawn nearer together, and are a more friendly and, I hope, a more reasonable people.

THE END

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